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**The Novelist as a Moral Physician: Fielding, Hume and the  
Moral Sense School of Thought**

**Romanopisec jakožto lékař morality: Fielding, Hume a  
filosofie morálního cítění**

**BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE**

Vedoucí bakalářské práce

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Jméno a příjmení

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## Abstract

*Tom Jones* was one of the seminal texts of fiction to come out of the eighteenth century that helped to build the English novel and to disseminate some of the philosophical tenets most significantly articulated by David Hume in his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and *A Treatise of Human Nature*. This work does not posit that Hume was the chief philosophical inspiration for Fielding; rather, the reason behind focus on Hume is that in his works we find the philosophy of the moral sense elaborated and articulated better than in any other moral philosopher of the eighteenth century, with the exception of Adam Smith. The aim of this thesis is to pursue the questions of ethics and sensibility as played out in Fielding's masterpiece, *Tom Jones*.

The thesis opens with an account of Fielding's background and divine, philosophical and literary influences. The development and mainly characteristics of the novel of sentiment (1740s to 1750s) and sensibility (60s-70s) will be discussed. The notion of moral sense and the merger of ethics with aesthetics will be tracked in the history of philosophy, with a special focus on the Scottish Enlightenment with its main proponents Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith. The next chapter comprises close readings of *Tom Jones*; how Fielding conceived of ethics in his work, how he implemented moral quandaries into the reading experience and how he involved the reader in the moral decision-making, e.g. in relation to his expert employment of satire and irony. Subsequently, there follows an essay on Hume, followed by a comparative section which elaborates on the similarities and discrepancies between Fielding and the mentioned philosophers, e.g. Fielding's "good-nature" vs. Hume's "sympathy" as the respective faculties that enable us to feel the pain of others.

With the thinkers maintaining common sense philosophy, or "a belief system that we have in order to be human," the discussion will also run as a retort to Mandeville's & Hobbes' notion that man is essentially driven by self-interest (found in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* and Hobbes' *Leviathan*). Yet when discussing Hume, this tenet as well as the foregrounding of reason in *Tom Jones* will get problematized and interpretative syntheses will be drawn. Hume's system borrows from both of the previous philosophical traditions of the

moral sense and of the selfish school of thought and Fielding conceives of reason and sense in quite a new way.

Key words: Fielding, Moral Theory, Hume, Moral philosophy, Early English novel, Comic novel

## Abstrakt

Kohéznost pojetí lidské přirozenosti a morálky v kontextu filosofie morálního citení bylo mezi mnoha mysliteli osmnáctého století až překvapivě homogenní. Tehdejší literatura a filosofie dospěly k velmi podobným závěrům ohledně toho co konstituuje dobrého člověka. *Tom Jones – osudy mladíka podstrčeného jako dítě do šlechtické rodiny* byl jeden z předních textů krásné literatury osmnáctého století, který pomohl vytvořit žánr (anglického) románu, a rozšířit některá filosofická tvrzení, jež zrcadlila myšlenky David Huma, předního anglicky píšícího filosofa osmnáctého století, které přednesl ve svém *Zkoumání morálních principů* a *Pojednání o lidské přirozenosti*. Tato práce však netvrdí, že by David Hume byl hlavní filosofickou inspirací Henryho Fieldinga; klíčově však, v Humově díle nalézáme filosofii morálního citění dotaženou do konce tak jako v žádném jiném filosofovi osmnáctého století, s výjimkou Adama Smithe. Tato práce si klade za cíl probrat se otázkami etiky a morálního citění ve Fieldingově vrcholném díle *Tom Jones*.

Na začátku teze se probírá Fieldingovo vzdělání a náboženské, filosofické a literární vlivy. Vývoj a hlavně charakteristika sentimentálního románu a románu citění je také zpracováno. Koncept morálního sensualismu je dohledán napříč historií filosofie se speciálním zaměřením na Skotské osvícenství, od Anthony Ashley Coopera, 3. hrabě Shaftesbury přes Francise Hutchesona až po Davida Huma a Adama Smithe. Další kapitola sestává z důkladných čteních *Toma Jonese*, zaměřující se na otázky etiky a morální estetiky a zapojení čtenáře do procesu morálního citění a rozhodování, např. skrz zručného užití satiry a ironie. Poté následuje část zabývající se Humem, následovaná komparativní složkou, která se noří do podobností a rozdílů mezi Fieldingem a zmíněnými filosofy, např. Fieldingova „dobrá povaha“ oproti Humově „sympatii“ jakožto schopnosti předpokladů, které nám umožňují cítit bolest druhých.

Jelikož probírání myslitelé byli zastánci víry, že lidé jsou v zásadě dobří, tak tato práce zároveň argumentuje proti Mandevillově a Hobbesově přesvědčení (*Bájký o včelách, Leviathan*), že lidé jsou v zásadě špatní a hnáni sebezájmem. Při diskuzi o Humovi se však tato filosofská dichotomie, stejně jako Fieldingův důraz na rozum zproblematizuje a interpretáční syntézi budou nastíněny. Hume totiž v určitém smyslu navazuje na Hobbese a Mandevilla a Fielding provádí osobitou fúzi rozumu a citění.

Klíčová slova: Fielding, morální teorie, Hume, morální filosofie, ranný anglický román

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## Introduction

The great moral debate of the Enlightenment on the British Isles saw two conceptions of the nature of human species contesting for intellectual dominance; that humans are essentially good or that humans are essentially bad, to put it criminally simply. On the one hand, we have the philosophers Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The affiliated novelists include selected writers of the novel of sentiment (1740s: Richardson) and the novel of sensibility (1760s: Walpole, Sterne, Goldsmith), chiefly however the subject of this study, Henry Fielding and his *A History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749). On the other hand, there is Bernard Mandeville and Thomas Hobbes who asserted the essential selfishness of mankind and whose arguments will be confronted in the course of this paper. The former, more optimistic camp claimed that people have an innate capacity to feel the pain of others and this shapes their conduct towards good deeds. The innate capacity to feel compassion assumes idiosyncratic forms depending on which of the above-mentioned thinkers is under scrutiny; nevertheless, underlying all their respective philosophies is the notion of moral sentiment and the concept of sensibility that unites their works.

“Enlightenment is the emancipation of man from a state of self-imposed tutelage,”<sup>1</sup> wrote Kant and thus famously articulated what he deemed to be the *zeitgeist* of the late eighteenth century / early nineteenth century era, some thirty-forty years after the major publications of the authors under discussion. The grip of the Church was loosening and in its wake God would see his deposition into deism. The individual received some of the spotlight at last and accordingly we can see the birth of a new species, that of a public intellectual, who relied more on his own reason than on the divine sanction. Fielding and other non-divines started to gain the platform and legitimacy for expressing corrective sentiments and pushing for betterment projects, thus joining the social protest tradition of Defoe and Swift. Fielding’s confrontation with the harsh realities of mid-century London, especially in *Amelia*, would in turn inspire Dickens.

We may witness the emergence of public opinion. Newspapers, periodicals, magazines, pamphlets, books, pirate versions of books, philosophical enquiries—all forming a vibrant inter-subjective exchange of judgements, sentiments, opinions and ridicule, also greatly fasciated by the burgeoning romance, the young English novel. The old arbiters of

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<sup>1</sup> Kant, Immanuel, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784) 1.



morality and expert opinion, the Clergy, are ridiculed all throughout the oeuvre of Henry Fielding, most strikingly in the sadistic character of Thwackum who conditions moral behaviour in absolute and absolutely self-serving terms, piousness motivated by the terrors and allurements of religion. By the same token, the other extreme, a philosophical objectification of the love of virtue, full of ineffectual maxims reminiscent of the more abstract moods of Shaftesbury's thoughts<sup>2</sup>, is mocked in the character of the cringe-worthy Square. These two modes of exploitation of the sublime—taking effect either by striking fear into the human heart or by impressing it with boundless beauty—represent two of the three possible motivations for benevolence; the third and the right genuine one, according to Fielding<sup>3</sup>, is sympathy. This echoes both Hume and Smith who also based their moral philosophies on the social virtue of sympathy.

There are two chief approaches criticism took to Fielding's work: the interpretation which took at face value his proclamation in his preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742) that it is a "comic Epic-Poem in prose"<sup>4</sup> and thus accounted genetically for his stylistic influences, which Fielding fused into one literary unit, the young English novel. In other words, Fielding is interpreted chiefly as a comic writer, supposedly writing the burlesque and therefore being perceived as a frivolous writer deviating from nature—a writer who cannot be taken seriously. Nonetheless Fielding was not just writing burlesque; he was a comic writer who with pith and wit elaborated on solemn subjects. His subject was the Ludicrous and he drew his material from Nature which abounds in truly ludicrous material.

As an epic, his work was considered only in scale, though the essential elements of the epic—"Fable, Action, Characters, Sentiments, and Diction"<sup>5</sup>—are all there. The particular comic spirit that breathes life and light to Fielding's works is quite elaborate and unique. Battestin writes that "the Comic Spirit is a genial and sociable Muse, capable of redeeming for us the mess of life—" a quality reminiscent of Aristotle and his theory of poetics that the observation and imagination of the writer should recreate and make sense out of the world. Battestin goes on to compare Fielding with the other canonical writers asserting that

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<sup>2</sup> Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 455.

<sup>3</sup> Fielding would mine the concept of the sublime himself, especially when discussing capital punishment.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 3.

<sup>5</sup> Fielding, 3.

“Fielding’s is the Comic Spirit we meet in Chaucer, but in few other English authors (Shakespeare is too brittle or too deep, Dickens too dark.”<sup>6</sup>

Then there is the moral theory interpretation, focusing less on the satirist, and more on the moralist, which is a rather recent yet well-treaded path (Martin C. Battestin 1975; Bernard Harrison 1975). Battestin calls Fielding a “moral physician,” a comprehensive identification of the underlying authorial aim executed in the comedy mode (*Shamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*), more earnestly in his later writings such as *Amelia* and especially in his legal and journalistic work, for instance his influential *Enquiry Into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers* (1951). This study zeros down on Fielding’s middle years when he was writing romances (1741-1749). This period followed the implementation of the Licensing Act of 1337 designed to put a legal muzzle on Fielding’s theatrical output since his anti-ministerial farces proved too efficient for the establishment to stomach. The thesis will contextualise and compare Fielding’s moral philosophy, revolving around the core notion of “Good-Nature,” with the moral systems of the other professional philosophers and assert the homogeneity of the ideas of this comprehensive moral sensing school of thought; that the philosophical and divine ideas about the characters of men were applied in *Tom Jones* in quite a unique manner; that certain leading literatures and certain leading philosophies were in this period closely wedded.

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<sup>6</sup> Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 331.

## I.

### Fielding's Influences & The Context of the Age; Latitudinarianism, The Augustan Satire, The Moral Sense Theory/Theory of Moral Sentiments

*In which Fielding's background is discussed and the history of "the theory that we perceive between right and wrong through the operation of a moral sense," is tracked down as it "is a doctrine which recurs perennially in English philosophy,"<sup>1</sup> as well as in the eighteenth century novel. The chapter gathers relevant definitions of the sentimental novel and the novel of sensibility and collates them with definitions of the Augustan mode in order to suggest Fielding's intermixing of the literary and philosophical aspects. Finally, the moral sense philosophers are ushered in.*

To provide an account of the intellectual environment which formed Fielding's mind, one must go back to school. Eton, where Fielding enrolled in 1719 (and ran away from in 1721 but returned after a couple months), was the most elite boarding school in Britain at that time and it has just witnessed a substantial shift in leadership as Andrew Snape (Tory, High Churchman) was removed. This was in light of the emerging dominance of Whig politics, Low Church and Latitudinarianism<sup>2</sup>. At Eton, the duties were immense: from memorizing the Ancients, the Old Testament and their respective commentators to an extra-curricular reading list of unappealing length. Moreover, scourging was a commonplace practice for disciplining the boys, a practice which Fielding condemned as Battestin writes that "to judge from what we have seen of his unruliness as a youth, he doubtless had numerous sharply felt personal reasons for doing so."<sup>3</sup>

Yet Eton endowed him with an excellent Classical Humanist education: he could read Greek and read and write Latin (this aspect later developed during his brief sojourn at Leyden). This rigorous schooling would later on manifest in his clause construction logic bordering on the architectural, in the precision and symmetry of his prose. When this stylistic mastery was combined with Fielding's idiosyncratic Anglo-Saxon idiom—energised by his robustly vigorous nature—we may then understand George Eliot's observation about "the lusty ease of Fielding's fine English."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, at Eton, he got deeply familiar with the philosophical and moral ideas of the day (like the moral sensing school of thought) and, in general, the environment stimulated his profound love of learning, later apparent in his texts,

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Harrison, *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher* (London: Sussex University Press, 1975) 17.

<sup>2</sup> Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Battestin, 41.

<sup>4</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Penguin, 2006) ch. XV.

which are elegantly infused with literary and philosophical allusions. After all, as Battestin writes, “he was a widely read man who left behind him a personal library that compares favourably with Dr. Johnson’s.” Actually, upon being auctioned, Fielding’s library fetched some £100 more than did the sale of Johnson’s books<sup>5</sup>.

### *Latitudinarianism*

Among his books the sermon “Of Being Imitators of Christ,” by Isaac Barrow, who was Fielding’s favourite divine—“to quote once more my beloved Author Dr. Barrow”<sup>6</sup>—may be claimed to have had a major influence on both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. In this sermon, Barrow argues for “the duty of imitating the examples of good men,”<sup>7</sup> with a focus on the Old Testament heroes to the detriment of the classical moral patterns: rather beneficence than dominance, charity than plunder and moral courage than valour on the battlefield: Abraham above Achilles. Barrow argues for the obvious advantage of real-life role-models, as “[i]t is a trite but true Observation, that Examples work more forcibly on the Mind than Precepts.” Fielding applies this and always casts an exemplary character to be followed, Squire Allworthy (from other novels of sensibility: Sir Charles Grandison, Dr. Primrose, Uncle Toby, etc.), and the main hero, Tom, who is trying to emulate the good-natured conduct of the role model. Allworthy was overtly based on George Lyttleton and Ralph Allen, both being Fielding’s dear friends and benefactors, but also on Shaftesbury and other deeply moral people of Fielding’s acquaintance. Tom is roughly based on Fielding’s own youthful struggle with curbing his “vehement passions.”<sup>8</sup>

The good-hearted hero has to be imperfect so that the reader can relate. As Fielding writes, “Indeed, nothing can be of more moral use than the imperfections which are seen in examples of this kind, since such form a kind of surprise, more apt to affect and dwell upon our minds than the faults of very vicious and wicked persons.”<sup>9</sup> Fielding’s aim in *Tom Jones* and other later works like *Amelia* is first and foremost instructive. He was after all a

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<sup>5</sup> A precise number of books that comprised Fielding’s personal library does exist in the form of the *Catalogue* put together by Samuel Baker. The number stands at 653 however based on the depth and breadth of Fielding’s allusions spread across his texts, his reading was much more extensive. Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 43, 610.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Fielding, n. 29, *The Covent-Garden Journal*, ed. Gerard Edward Jensen (London: OUP, 1915) 308.

<sup>7</sup> Michael C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding’s Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975) 32.

<sup>8</sup> Battestin.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (London: Penguin Books, 2012) IV. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

Magistrate and a dedicated proponent the cause of justice and order (having founded the first police force in London, The Bow Street Runners, and having dedicated the final frail years of his life to the daily drudgery of a Middlesex Justice).

When discussing the moral value imparted upon the reader as a result of engaging with the book, Ian Watt, comparing the rather objective world of *Tom Jones* with the subjective probe of *Clarissa*, writes that, “we shall be wholly immersed in the reality of the characters and their actions [in case of *Clarissa*], but whether we shall be any wiser as a result is open to question.”<sup>10</sup> The lesson to be learned from the picaresque roving of Tom is the moral philosophy of the good heart and, in case of Tom’s character, the need for temperance and prudence. What Fielding sets himself to do in this book is to present a likable, relatable “Christian Hero,”<sup>11</sup> for the improvement of society.

This Christian Hero has been drawn from the works of such Latitudinarian churchmen as Isaac Barrow, John Tillotson, Samuel Clarke, and Benjamin Hoadly—“all of whom Fielding read with sympathy and admiration.”<sup>12</sup> But perhaps best articulated for our purposes in the exhaustive title of Richard Steele’s *The Christian Hero: An Argument Proving That No Principles but Those of Religion are Sufficient to Make a Great Man* (1701). The two cardinal virtues—one towards ourselves, the other exemplifying how to behave towards others—being

...that we govern our passions by reason, and moderate our selves  
in the use of sensual delights, so as not to transgress the rules of  
temperance and chastity; that we demean ourselves towards others,  
and converse with them with justice and fidelity, with kindness  
and charity.<sup>13</sup>

As stated here personal chastity and social charity are the pillars of the character of the Christian Hero, of the good man.<sup>14</sup> Tom Jones, who has a good heart from the beginning, which makes bestowing charity upon others second nature to him, however lacks firm

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<sup>10</sup> Ian Watt, “Fielding as Novelist: *Tom Jones*,” *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Tom Jones*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. & Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968) 32.

<sup>11</sup> Michael C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding’s Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Battestin, 14.

<sup>13</sup> John Tillotson, Sermon CI, “Of the Work Assign’d to Every Man, and the Season for Doing it,” *Sermons*, VI, 283.

<sup>14</sup> Or woman, though the then authors were stark backwards when it came to gender awareness or feminism or equality, as those concepts had not properly existed back then, and would take at least a hundred years to fully form and gain due recognition in the suffrage movements of late nineteenth century. There is a charming passage in Fielding’s *An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men*, where he admits he has no idea about the characters of women, “as it is in fact a science to which I make not the least pretension” (411).

governance over his passions and sound resolve in his decision-making which are somewhat slipshod.

This doctrine had been much more controversial than might seem and the proponents of the Latitudinarian movement dubbed Low Church (and later on Broad Church) were derided by the High Church clergy who in the Latitudinarian emphasis on manifest charity and the sufficiency of reason and Holy Spirit alone for salvation perceived a threat to the Anglican/Episcopal establishment. Doing without the liturgy and discarding the dogmas was not acceptable. Accordingly the Latitudinarian liberal practises, where doctrinal observance is demoted to works of charity, have been dubbed *Cafeteria Catholic* for either eclectically omitting the central tenants of the Church or doing away with them altogether—it smacked of deism. Fielding’s deism has been discussed at length, rather controversially but nowadays the topic is not stirring waves as it used to due to the secularization of society at large.

George Whitefield, a staunch Calvinist preacher, “who with John Wesley was inaugurating the Methodist revival,”<sup>15</sup> or the Great Awakening (mainly in the North American colonies), decried those who supported the pragmatic, loosely doctrinal strain of Christianity. Whitefield claimed that the Low Church divines were supplying their flocks “only with the dry husks of dead morality,”<sup>16</sup> and that “[t]his, this is only Deism refined.”<sup>17</sup> However, against the fiery Methodist upsurge, “the rational, Pelagian morality of the latitudinarians” shone clear with common-sense and practicality for the benefit of society. To the ire of the justification-by-faith-alone side, Hoadly wrote that, “We may be ... certain, That an honest *Heathen* is much more acceptable to [God], than a dishonest and deceitful *Christian*; and that a charitable and good-natured *Pagan* has a better Title to his Favour, than a cruel and barbarous Christian; let him be never so orthodox in his faith.”<sup>18</sup>

Fielding was very religious and does ground his morality in God (he had been perceived as an orthodox moralist for a long time in the Fielding Studies<sup>19</sup>), however he also has an especially scornful relationship with the clergy, as can be observed on the morally corrupt and hypocrite character of reverend Mr. Thwackum and on hypocrite “Christians” and “Clergymen” in general. To corroborate this claim, and to thus forge a link with the Latitudinarians, let us take a look at the scene very early on in the book in chapter three, aptly

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<sup>15</sup> Michael C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding’s Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975) 22-23.

<sup>16</sup> George Whitefield, Sermon XXXVIII, “The Indwelling of the Spirit, the Common Privilege of All Believers,” *Works*, VI, 95.

<sup>17</sup> George Whitefield, Sermon IX, “The Folly and Danger of Being Not Righteous Enough,” *Works*, V, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Hoadly, Sermon XVI, “The Good Samaritan,” *Twenty Sermons*, 332.

<sup>19</sup> William B. Coley, “The Background of Fielding’s Laughter,” *ELH* 26.2 (1959): 229.

subtitled, “*An odd Accident which befell Mr Allworthy, at his Return home. The decent Behaviour of Mrs Deborah Wilkins, with some proper Animadversions on Bastards.*” (7) In this chapter, Mr Allworthy discovers a foundling shuffled among his wardrobe sheets. Despite having arrived “much fatigued,” (7) after a long—what we would now call—business trip to London, his good nature does not fail him and infuses his breast with compassion upon seeing “an Infant, wrapt up in some coarse Linen, in a sweet and profound sleep” (7).

He immediately summons Mrs Deborah Wilkins, his trusted housemaid. As the subtitle suggests, Mrs Wilkins berates the “wicked Strumpet,” the whole class of “wicked Sluts,” who dare to “lay their Sins at honest Mens Doors” (9). Mrs Wilkins, to whom the baby does not even “smell Christian,” (9) deems it more ‘Christian’ to drop and leave baby Tom on the steps of the church to be collected by the Parish in the morning. Fielding thus sets the scene to display that inhumanity of the Christian ‘morality’ very well. Fielding has Ms Wilkins conclude that as “[i]t is a good Night, only a little rainy and windy; and if it [baby Tom] was well wrapt up, and put in a warm Basket, it is two to one but it lives, till it is found in the Morning” (9).

The good Squire Allworthy does not pay much attention to Mrs Wilkins righteous exposé and instructs her to take care of the infant till matters will have been decided in the morning. The observant Mrs Wilkins, who has been enjoying an “excellent position” in the house, promptly cedes and then she “take[s] the Child under her Arms, without any apparent Disgust at the Illegality of its Birth; and declaring it was a sweet little Infant, walk[s] off with it to her own Chamber” (10). She only needed the ‘human touch’ to be swayed into good natured compassion (also not wanting to risk her employ), and so as she might be a righteous Christian in her outraged words, in praxis, she is capable of human compassion even to a child born of sin. As many of the Latitudinarian clerics claimed (as quoted by Hoadly above), it is better to have a heathen acting like a true Christian, than a self-proclaimed Christian acting like the devil. Here, Mrs Wilkins acted like a true Christian, even though her orthodox, cold-hearted doctrine would bid her do otherwise. The good Squire Allworthy takes that for granted as he is an exemplary character of a true Christian.

### *Neoclassicism*

Neoclassicism held intellectual predominance during the Restoration (1660-1689) and the Augustan periods (first half of the eighteenth century - 1740s), or the Age of Reason. It is

an age of satire and of the nuanced, stylised prose Fielding himself was a great culmination of.

Here is a useful overview of some elemental aspects and context of Neoclassicism:

In part as a reaction to the bold egocentrism of the Renaissance that saw man as larger than life and boundless in potential, the neoclassicists directed their attention to a smaller scaled concept of man as an individual within a larger social context, seeing human nature as dualistic, flawed, and needing to be curbed by reason and decorum. In style, neoclassicists continued the Renaissance value of balanced antithesis, symmetry, restraint, and order. Additionally, they sought to achieve a sense of refinement, good taste, and correctness. Their clothes were complicated and detailed, and their gardens were ornately manicured and geometrically designed. They resurrected the classical values of unity and proportion and saw their art as a way to entertain and inform, a depiction of humans as social creatures, as part of polite society. Their manner was elitist, erudite, and sophisticated.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the mentioned characteristics check out yet, in a typically Augustan manner, all this can be subverted, and in Fielding it most of the time is, using layers of irony. The human individual is perceived in *Tom Jones* as a unit that is a part of a greater whole, complying with the Aristotelian plot-over-character dictum. In *Tom Jones* it is a behemoth of a plot that overarches any individual character in the book. The individual is seen as a unit that needs further betterment, nevertheless, the betterment should be directed by the wisdom of the good heart as well as reason—in this, Fielding overlaps into the novel of sentiment. For the Augustans, the human being is too flawed for his or her heart to have a say. For Fielding (as for the Latitudinarians, the moral sense philosophers and Rousseau), man *is* essentially good and his or her heart should be highly regarded. In terms of the elitism, erudition and the level of sophistication, Fielding was a classist, truly believing in the birth-based, structured hierarchical society nearly feudal in character<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, he was constantly poking fun at the aristocracy, their supposed erudition, and anybody who boasts his or her supposed sophistication and experience of the world like Mrs. Western does. More often than not, in the

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<sup>20</sup> *Literary Movements for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context and Criticism on Literary Movements* (2009): < <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3279300031/neoclassicism.html>>, 2016 *Encyclopedia.com*, [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2016].

<sup>21</sup> M.R. Zirker, "Fielding's Social Pamphlets," *English Studies* no.31 (Los Angeles: University of California, 1966) 136.



world of *Tom Jones*, as in reality, the ones who claim class the loudest tend to be the biggest fops; as well as those who smile the most tend to be the biggest villains.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Powerful Potential for Goodness*

Isaac Barrow, one of Fielding's favourite Latitudinarian preachers uses a florid metaphor of seeds to articulate the idea of inherent goodness, or at least the universal potential for goodness in any a person, if circumstances allow:

There do remain, dispersed in the soil of human nature, divers seeds of goodness, of benignity, of ingenuity, which being cherished, excited, and quickened by good culture, do, to common experience, thrust out flowers very lovely, yield fruits very pleasant of virtue and goodness.

Then, Barrow tells us that man, "if well managed, if instructed by good discipline, if guided by good example, if living under the influence of wise laws and virtuous governors, is naturally inclined to benevolence."<sup>23</sup> However, "from neglect of good education; from ill conduct, ill custom, ill example, wickedness and folly are rife."<sup>24</sup>

Fielding, though he does believe in this, plays upon it to a hilarious degree; he takes the topic of enabling and encouraging people to be good and to flourish at face value (as it is a great theory) and transplants it unto all the tyrannical tutors, brute fathers, or dictatorial aunts peopling the world of *Tom Jones*; all the way from reverend Thwackum to Squire Western. By doing this, Fielding does not discredit the theory of virtuous governance and the inherent quality of the good heart, but rather discloses how applying this commendable doctrine usually turns out in reality. Hypocrites, with nothing but themselves on their minds, will find themselves in positions of educational power and exert their influence on behalf of 'virtue' and 'edification', only to rather stifle the growth towards goodness. Battestin concludes that, "[t]his constant emphasis upon the human potential for perfection, if only the corrosive

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Fielding, "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," *The Works of Henry Fielding, Esq. With an Essay on his Life and Genius by Arthur Murphy, Esq.*, IX (Red Lion Passage, Fleet Street: Nichols and Son, Printers, 1806) 409.

<sup>23</sup> Isaac Barrow, Sermon VII, "The Being of God Proved from the Frame of Human Nature," *Works*, V, 222-226.

<sup>24</sup> Barrow, 222-226.

pressures of corrupted custom, education, and example could be removed, afforded a convenient rationale for Fielding's social satire."<sup>25</sup>

The issue of Nature vs. Nurture is here solved, at least as far as those who are being discussed are concerned. There is a tangible presupposition, or dogma, that if the circumstances of one's upbringing allow for cultivating good nature, good nature and not self-interest is going to remain the default setting of the person in question<sup>26</sup>. In like manner, Hume wrote, where he discusses the limits to which ultimate causes of human motives should be chased, that "no man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others."<sup>27</sup> Hume posits this as a fact of observation and experience. In the same vein, though a bit more ornately put, Fielding wrote that "there are scarce any Natures so entirely diabolical, as to be capable of doing Injuries, without paying themselves some Pangs, for the Ruin which they bring on their fellow Creatures" (667).

### *The Sentimental Novel and the Novel of Sensibility*

In light of the demise of Neoclassicism, the centre of attention moved from the head to the heart and hundreds of years of stifled emotions started gushing out as novels of sentiment flooded the bookstands. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* offers this entry under the heading "sentimental novel," listing some of the most famous specimen:

A form of fiction popular in 18<sup>th</sup> c. England. It concentrated on the distresses of the virtuous and attempted to show that a sense of honour and moral behaviour were justly rewarded. It also attempted to show that effusive emotion was evidence of kindness and goodness. The classic example was Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), the story of a servant girl who withstood every attack on her honour. Comparable but more readable novels in this category were Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1770), Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and Maria Edgeworth's *Castle*

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<sup>25</sup> Michael C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975) 17.

<sup>26</sup> Bearing in mind that the Hobbes/Mandeville vs. Shaftesbury/Hutchenson/Rousseau/Hume selfish vs. good heart debate will be discussed mainly in the third chapter.

<sup>27</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: OUP, 2010) 38.

*Rackrent* (1800). Sentimentality was very apparent in Sterne. In this period scores of sentimental novels were published and read avidly.<sup>28</sup>

The Penguin editors are describing the already realised intention of the writers of the sentimental novel; gushy heroes/heroines in distress, who have their virtue rightfully rewarded. As we can see in *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741), Fielding mocked those who took this in earnest and who have not added the self-reflective, ironical layer as he had. In *Shamela*, Fielding mocks the calculating morality where a maid is encouraged to withhold her virtue but not because it is right but because she should get a 'better deal' by making the suitor marry her. Certain critics have read *Shamela* as Fielding's objection to a mere maid rising to the status of a lady. Fielding was traditional and conservative in his thinking about social hierarchies after all, nevertheless the former reading is arguably more accurate.

Britannica's definition goes a little more critical:

Sentimental novel, broadly, any novel that exploits the reader's capacity for tenderness, compassion, or sympathy to a disproportionate degree by presenting a beclouded or unrealistic view of its subject. In a restricted sense the term refers to a widespread European novelistic development of the 18th century, which arose partly in reaction to the austerity and rationalism of the Neoclassical period. The sentimental novel exalted feeling above reason and raised the analysis of emotion to a fine art.<sup>29</sup>

Here, the Britannica editors bare the real backdoor motivations of the writers of novels of sentiment; the negative, emotionally-saturated and reader-manipulative aspects, some might call it emotional blackmail, carefully calibrated to solicit tears. These aspects are indeed present in *Tom Jones* yet, as has been argued, *Tom Jones* has many more layers and much greater depth than just soliciting tears; for one, he prefers to procure laughter and his 'manipulation' with the reader has substantial end—moral wisdom.

The reader is led to the goal of moral wisdom by way of assessing and comparing the characters, the words they say and the actions they actually commit. Fielding always presents a situation crafted with a rich description of the setting and with lively dialogue and it is up to

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<sup>28</sup> J.A. Cuddon (revised by C.E. Preston), *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 808.

<sup>29</sup> <<http://www.britannica.com/art/sentimental-novel>>, 2016 *Encyclopædia Britannica* [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2016].

the reader to decide—to intuit—what was the right, self-less thing to do or say in the given situation and which character approximated the best course of action to win approbation. Above all, what were the motivations behind the character's actions and how (in)congruously those motivations aligned in the end with the actual conduct. The reader is able to glimpse this by picking up on more or less subtle ironies strewn across the text, by applying her moral sense and expressing either approbation or condemnation. This is achieved through apt use of the moral sense. As Britannica observes, in the early eighteenth century, the then authors and thinkers "raised the analysis of emotion to a fine art." This refocusing of literary and philosophical attention was correspondent by the then aestheticization of morality, as developed by the Earl of Shaftesbury.

When one tries to look up the novel of sensibility, *Penguin's* entry reads: "See NOVEL OF SENTIMENT."<sup>30</sup> This stands proof to the overlapping of the novel of sentiment and the novel of sensibility. The encyclopedia Britannica expounds in its pithy manner:

In the 1760s the sentimental novel developed into the "novel of sensibility," which presented characters possessing a pronounced susceptibility to delicate sensation. Such characters were not only deeply moved by sympathy for their fellow man but also reacted emotionally to the beauty inherent in natural settings and works of art and music. The prototype was Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), which devotes several pages to describing Uncle Toby's horror of killing a fly. The literature of Romanticism adopted many elements of the novel of sensibility, including responsiveness to nature and belief in the wisdom of the heart and in the power of sympathy. It did not, however, assimilate the novel of sensibility's characteristic optimism.<sup>31</sup>

What has been strengthened and developed, then, is the aesthetic aspect, truly appreciating and being deeply touched by witnessing pain or charitable deeds *and* great works of art and impressive natural scenes. The emotional affect has been amplified even further. The Augustan cerebral influence is felt to a much lesser degree. In this tear soaked soil, we can already sense the daffodil stirring.

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<sup>30</sup> J.A. Cuddon (revised by C.E. Preston), *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 602.

<sup>31</sup> <<http://www.britannica.com/art/sentimental-novel>>, 2016 *Encyclopædia Britannica* [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2016].

Let us now recapitulate the notorious Uncle Toby Spares a Fly scene for purposes of seeing where the genre went in the 60s and where did the aesthetics stand. Upon witnessing Uncle Toby's good natured leniency, Tristram admits that "the action itself was more in unison to [his] nerves at that age of pity, which instantly set [his] whole frame into one vibration."<sup>32</sup> This is representatively far-fetched yet very useful illustration of a symphony of feeling, of two good hearted beings chiming in sympathy. Here we can observe the sensitive protagonist whose sensibilities are wired like antennae, here we can see a greater retreat into the private, into introspection of one's feelings. We cannot know to what extent this passage is in earnest. This mode of writing was very popular in the 1760s and so, Sterne might have been employing it a bit excessively to attract audience or simply to make fun of the over-sensitive aesthetics. In any case, Uncle Toby is the novel of sensibilities hero par excellence.

The narrator of *Tristram Shandy* then concludes by positioning stress on everyday examples of charity over insipid moral tracts:

And tho' I would not depreciate what the study of the *Literae humaniores*, at the university, have done for me in that respect, or discredit the other helps of an expensive education bestowed upon me, both at home and abroad since;—yet I often think that I owe one half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression.<sup>33</sup>

This is very much in line with Fielding's latitudinarian sensibility of primacy of charitable works over religious observance of rituals or mere preaching; primacy of moral doing over moral theory.

The foregrounding of the aesthetic aspect in moral matters, or sensory, intuitive impression rather than reasoned analysis, had already been very much present in the age of the novel of sentiment (1740s and 1750s). However, this had been articulated more clearly and much earlier in philosophy, in the moral sense theory of Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume—chiefly in the sense that moral value judgements and feelings of approbation find their origins in sensibility, not in reason, yet the whole process would be incomplete without reason assessing the facts of the case. The term aesthetic here rather already anticipates

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<sup>32</sup> Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: OUP, 2009) 80.

<sup>33</sup> Sterne, 81.

Kant, for whom it denoted “the science of sensory perception,”<sup>34</sup> but at the same time, “[o]f or relating to the perception, appreciation, or criticism of that which is beautiful;”<sup>35</sup> hence, having the sensory faculty for feeling morality. Fielding was one of the earliest literary proponents of the moral sense philosophy or of perceiving good deeds as pleasing and beautiful and awe-some, drawing on the mentioned divine and philosophical influences.

To pick up on Britannica’s definition of the novel of sensibility where sensitiveness to great works of art and great natural landscapes plays a defining role, the mentioned development into Romanticism is by and large via the notion of the sublime. For the discussed thinkers, the sublime pertains to the aestheticization of morality. The concept of the sublime—from the time of Longinus’s *On the Sublime* (1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD) to Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)—has been undergoing extensive re-conception and re-appropriation. Drawing on the concept of the sublime in both its beautiful and horrifying iterations Fielding would employ the concept both when presenting a selfless deed that struck the readers’ sensibilities as beautiful and therefore moral and also when he became a magistrate he would propose making the public spectacle of execution take place behind closed doors. Since hanging and beheading became a form of public entertainment and gave platform for last minute pronouncements by rebellious convicts, it made sense moving the spectacle away from sight. By not witnessing the executions and only hearing about them, the dark realms of the imagination of the populace would be fired up and the punishment, Fielding argued, would thus become more effectual.<sup>36</sup>

Fielding found himself somewhere in the middle between the Augustan and the sentimental sensibilities (‘sensibilities’ here meant in the common meaning of a set of defining preferences, or a particularity of taste to a certain demographic/place/era). He was a true Augustan with his symmetrical, well-structured, satirical, multi-layered writing, parodying the sentimental novels of the day, mainly in *Shamela*, which is pure Menippean satire (parody and burlesque) owing its existence solely to the inspirationally bad writing of Richardson. Still but much less so in *Joseph Andrews*, a raw novel that could already stand on its own, losing the status of a literary foil, and where Fielding was copying from “the Book of

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<sup>34</sup> “aesthetic,” n. and adj.,” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (December 2016) 3 January 2017.

<sup>35</sup> “aesthetic,” n. and adj.,” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (December 2016) 3 January 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 518.

Nature,”<sup>37</sup> rather than the book being a direct reaction to any other book leaving the genre of the burlesque far behind. In *Tom Jones*, however, we can already see a fully matured, self-contained comic epic in prose, a novel. *Tom Jones* amalgamates the topoi of the sentimental novel (virtuous hero/heroine in distress being justly rewarded, effusive displays of emotions being valued as marks of goodness) and of the novel of sensibility (elaborate moral responsiveness graduating into a system of aesthetics) into its richly textured, plot-driven Augustan style.

### *Sensibility*

Literary sensibility in this period cannot be bounded to a single definition; rather, this whole thesis is, in a way, an attempt at elucidating this term. Nonetheless, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* offers this generic definition: “The term became popular in the eighteenth century, when it acquired the meaning of ‘susceptibility to tender feelings’; thus, a capacity not for feeling sorry for oneself so much as being able to identify with and respond to the sorrows of others – and to respond to the beautiful.”<sup>38</sup> OED does a little better in stipulating, as a last entry at the bottom of the ‘sensibility’ list of definitions, that “[i]n the 18th and early 19th c. (afterwards somewhat *rarely*): Capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; also, readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art.”<sup>39</sup>

Sensibility is a very useful point of reference if one needs to find a common thread uniting the works of eighteenth century literature and philosophy. One must take heed not to impose too much sentiment on Fielding, whose early ‘novelistic’ output (*Shamela*, and partly *Joseph Andrews*) was written against the best-selling novels of sentiment of his age, rather mocking the effeminate bathos, lack of solid moral fibre, and subjective probing. The same would apply to his plays, which were mostly satires and were the leading reason for the introduction of The Licensing Act of 1737.

Martin Battestin likens the rise of the novel to an oddly paired couple as he writes that, “the English novel came all at once into being as an art form, its two main directions—

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<sup>37</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 8.

<sup>38</sup> J.A. Cuddon (revised by C.E. Preston), *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 807.

<sup>39</sup> “sensibility, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2016. Web. 22 June 2016.

inward, toward the individual personality, and outward, toward the panorama of society— arising from the conflicting temperaments and literary motives of two very different men, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding.”<sup>40</sup> Battestin playfully concludes, “[i]t could hardly be called a marriage, but from the rude and often hilarious conjunction of Richardson’s feminine sensibilities and Fielding’s robust masculinity, the modern novel was born.” Fiedler depicts Fielding more accurately as promoting a “masculine sentimentality.”<sup>41</sup>

Where we first saw the Christian Hero, here we have the Man of Feeling. Both these tropes were very much present in Fielding’s mind as he was crafting Tom and Allworthy, and both have sensibility as the basis of their being and conduct.

Markman Ellis here lists all the fields, across which the concept and influence of sensibility stretched:

Sensibility operates within a variety of fields of knowledge, beyond the strict confines of the history of literature. These include: (1) the history of ideas (moral sense philosophy); (2) the history of aesthetic (taste); (3) the history of religion (Latitudinarians and the rise of philanthropy); (4) the history of political economy (civic humanism and *le doux commerce*); (5) the history of science (physiology and optics); (6) the history of sexuality (conduct books and the rise of the domestic woman) and (7) the history of popular culture (periodicals and popular writing). The novel of sensibility is the amalgamation of these differing discourses; yet, paradoxically, literary sensibility is distinct and separate from these discourses.<sup>42</sup>

Nearly all the mentioned fields somewhat touch Fielding’s or Hume’s concerns. This shared interest in the study of the sense and art demonstrates why literature and philosophy were rather homogenous in ideas. Also, we can see in this confluence of interests articulated all across philosophy, literature, and popular culture the budding platforms that facilitated the

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Battestin, “Introduction,” *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, by Henry Fielding, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961) v-xl.

<sup>41</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 8.



rise of public opinion. Magazines flourished: like Steele's *The Tatler*, Addison and Steele's *Spectator*, Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler*, or Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*. Fielding himself would launch an impressive circulation of periodicals, for instance *The Champion* or the *Covent-Garden Journal*. Issue of these magazines usually featured cultivated essays on contemporary manners and politics and would serve as a manual for refined learnedness for the aspiring lower middle classes.

### *The Birth of the Moral Sensing School of Thought*

As Ellis corroborates, “[m]any recent critics, taking a ‘history of ideas’ approach, have located the origin of literary sentimentalism in the writing of the moral philosophers of the early eighteenth century, constructing a history of sentimentalism – which might be called the ‘Enlightenment account’ – that traces the progressive refinement of ideas about virtue and society, benevolence and taste through the philosophical writings of the period.”<sup>43</sup> Here, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) will be discussed.

Shaftesbury is said to have originated the idea of the moral sense (Ellis, Battestin, Britannica, etc.). As Ellis expounds, “Shaftesbury argued that moral decisions are not made by reason but by a moral sense, a sixth sense equivalent to the other senses of sight and taste,”<sup>44</sup> thus the affinity to Kant a hundred years on into the future, morality as “the science of sensory perception.” However, not to interpret Shaftesbury in a narrow view that would omit important aspects of his theory for the purposes of this paper, as Gill at the *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* foregrounds, “Shaftesbury is often credited with originating the moral sense theory, although his own views of virtue are a mixture of rationalism and sentimentalism.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, it would be highly reductive to label Shaftesbury a sentimental theorist, conjecturing his theory to be solely based on emotive accounts of the human nature. Similarly it would be a limiting misapprehension to label Fielding a sentimental writer. In Shaftesbury, everything derives from “a powerfully teleological

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<sup>43</sup> Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 9.

<sup>44</sup> Ellis, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Michael B. Gill, “Lord Shaftesbury [Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury]”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2011): <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/shaftesbury/>>, [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2016].

approach, according to which all things are part of a harmonious cosmic order.”<sup>46</sup> And therefore, if one wishes to explain what it means to be good and virtuous, one must place the agent in the context of a larger system, the society. It was one of Fielding’s (and of Hume’s) chief points as a moral theorist as well to point to the larger societal structure, to perceive the human being as intrinsically social. Human morality is then grounded on the need for each other, on the need to cooperate and survive by each other’s sides.

Shaftesbury wrote that “Sense of Right and Wrong therefore being as natural to us as natural Affection it-self, and being a first Principle in our Constitution and Make; there is no speculative Opinion, Persuasion or Belief, Which is capable immediately or directly to exclude or destroy it.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, no matter our other “speculative Opinion, Persuasion or Belief,” there will always shine through an inherent, God-given faculty—a sense as natural as the sense of smell—that will fill our breast either with approbation or disagreement upon witnessing a given act. The only thing that can sway it is a differing feeling of (dis-)like that would annul the initial moral judgement. This “Sense of Right and Wrong” functions as a reflective faculty that reacts to the feelings of “goodness,” the moral sense is “a second-order affection” that perceives other affections as subjects, which it likes or dislikes. However, “the term [moral sense] is not one he emphasized much or explained in detail.”<sup>48</sup> It is not a distinct psychological faculty, as it is with Hutcheson.

According to Shaftesbury, a virtuous act deserving approbation is such an act that benefits the species—and, on extension, the universe, the “harmonious cosmic order.” Here is where reason comes in. Though the judgement itself is carried out naturally by the innate moral sense, it is reason that evaluates if the witnessed act is beneficial to society. Moreover, Shaftesbury claims that by possessing the moral sense, we thus gain access to an objective realm of morality. Gill writes that “there is a standard of morality, according to Shaftesbury, that is as real and mind-independent as standards of harmony and order in numbers.”<sup>49</sup> And here it is where Fielding would smile, and start thinking of the character of Square, with his “eternal Fitness of things.”

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<sup>46</sup> Gill.

<sup>47</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit,” *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols. (London: no Publisher, 1711) II, Book 1.

<sup>48</sup> Gill.

<sup>49</sup> Gill.

Francis Hutcheson, to whom Adam Smith, one of his most prominent students, referred as “the never to be forgotten Hutcheson,”<sup>50</sup> (he would never call anybody like that ever again, with one exception) held the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow. “In reply to Mandeville,” who published his *The Fable of the Bees: or, private vices, public benefits* (1705-25) as an immediate challenge, Ellis notes, “Francis Hutcheson refined and strengthened Shaftesbury’s somewhat nebulous notion of the moral sense in his *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725).”<sup>51</sup> Hutcheson argued for the purity of intention when it comes to doing good, and for the significance and distinctiveness of the moral sense. “AUTHOR of *Nature*,” Hutcheson writes, “has given us a MORAL SENSE to direct our Actions, and to give us still *nobler Pleasures*; so that while we are only intending the Good of others, we undesignedly promote our own greatest *private Good*.”<sup>52</sup> The “undesignedly” here is the crucial point where the weight of the argument lies. For Hutcheson, pleasure drawn for oneself from acts of goodness must not have been presupposed; only pleasantly and humbly welcomed. For Mandeville argued that men are driven by greedy self-interest, that only sometimes ends up helping others, and indirectly at that. “By a happy coincidence and by unintended consequence,” Ellis comments, “Mandeville reasoned, there flows from this self-interested pursuit of ‘private vice’ a number of ‘public benefits’ to society.”<sup>53</sup>

Hutcheson further wrote that “[i]f there be any *Benevolence* at all, it must be *disinterested*; for the most useful action imaginable loses all appearance of Benevolence as soon as we discern that it only flowed from Self-Love or Interest.”<sup>54</sup> Here the weight of the argument lies in the “only,” and through purely textual analysis, the “only” does allow for other reasons and motivations behind one’s act of goodness. Nevertheless, a self-less will to aiding others must hold undisputed prime. And, according to Hutcheson, it should be no bother as virtue has a lovely form, pursuit of which instils pleasure into our bosom—ergo, the aestheticization of morality.

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<sup>50</sup> Adam Smith, “The Never to Be Forgotten Hutcheson: Excerpts from W.R. Scott,” *Econ Journal Watch* 8.1 (2011): 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ellis, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Francis Hutcheson, “Section 1: Of the Moral Sense by Which We Perceive Virtue and Vice, and Approve or Disapprove Them in Others,” *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas and Beauty and Virtue; in two treatises* (London: J.Darby; Dublin: W. and J. Smith, 1725) 116.

<sup>53</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, private vices, public benefits* (1705-1725), ed. Phillip Harth (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989).

<sup>54</sup> Hutcheson, 129.

The insistence on inner motivations is decisive, not unlike Immanuel Kant's theory of morality, where even if an agent ends up doing harm, it is excusable if she had virtuous motivations to begin with.<sup>55</sup> However, Kant had a much more reason-based system. In Fielding, the center focus of this study, motivations are not as much pried into as, for example, in Richardson. What is, nonetheless, very much like Fielding, besides the theory of the moral sense, is Hutcheson's applied ethics. In wake of the Scottish Enlightenment, there had been a great pedagogical tradition being born at Glasgow where English and not Latin started to be heard at last, but also it was generally understood that one ought to follow what one was being taught. Hutcheson, as he assumed his Chair, "proved himself the disciple of Shaftesbury in his enthusiasm for virtue, which led him into frequent bursts of eloquence, in praise of all that was noble and beautiful in a rightly ordered life." Hutcheson was driving at "the culture of the heart as a main end of all moral instruction—"56made feasible only with the advent of the "Professor-preacher."<sup>57</sup>

In this effusive endeavour to lead one's fellow humans towards self-less goodness, pursuing virtue for the sake of virtue, Fielding could very much relate, especially with the phrasing "the culture of the heart as a main end of all moral instruction;" and, since so many of the leading philosophers and writers of the day were engaged in just such ventures, we can observe the charitable, self-bettering zeitgeist of the age. Fielding himself wrote that, "Charity is in fact the very Characteristic of this Nation at this Time," and he does not stop there: "I Believe we may challenge the whole World to parallel the Examples which we have of late given of this sensible, this noble, this Christian virtue."<sup>58</sup> The Latitudurian preachers, and the moral philosophers who have been discussed form the chief influence on Fielding's conception of morality, of what constitutes a good man, and of the faculty to determine right from wrong—the moral sense.

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<sup>55</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, transl. And ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>56</sup> William Robert Scott, *Frances Hutcheson: His Life, Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1900).

<sup>57</sup> Scott.

<sup>58</sup> Henry Fielding, "The Covent-Garden Journal, 44" (1752), *The Covent-Garden Journal and a Plan of the Universal Register-Office*, ed. Bertrand A. Goldar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 247.

### *Literary Influences*

For Fielding, the libertine playwright, Aristophanes and other Greek and Roman classics were his role models. For Fielding, the novelist, above all, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616) and Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) inspired his endeavours. What Cervantes gave Fielding was the very idea of the novel and the idiosyncratic hero. The picaresque hero (or ‘pícaro,’ for ‘rogue’) as Penguin dictates, “is the servant of several masters. Through his experience this picaroon satirizes the society in which he lives.”<sup>59</sup> Tom could be said to be the servant to the ladies in power, to have roved quite a bit, and to be baring undesignedly the hypocrisy of the other characters; however, to be a proper *pícaro*, he would have to possess guile. To Fielding and the then society, the character of Tom might have seemed imprudent, depraved even, but a true picaroon lies and steals (and gets away with it).

This is due to Fielding only absorbing useful elements of the picaresque novel, as *Britannica* notes that,

in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century the growth of the realistic novel with its tighter, more-elaborate plot and its greater development of character led to the final decline of the picaresque novel, which came to be considered somewhat inferior in artistry. But the opportunities for satire provided by the picaresque novel’s mingling of characters from all walks of life, its vivid descriptions of industries and professions, its realistic language and detail, and above all its ironic and detached survey of manners and morals helped to enrich the realistic novel and contributed to that form’s development in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>60</sup>

Many of these read as a direct description of Fielding’s art, but there are points, of course, which are more complex than that: the “realistic language,” for instance—and here we segue to discussing the influence of Swift on Fielding—cannot be read and taken at face value as the texts permeate thick layers of irony. Swift employed irony masterfully, most famously in *The Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and especially in *The Modest Proposal* (1729). Fielding, not trusting his audiences to decipher his meaning as much as Swift did—or caring more for the

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<sup>59</sup> J.A. Cuddon (revised by C.E. Preston), *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 666.

<sup>60</sup> <<http://www.britannica.com/art/picaresque-novel>>, 2016 *Encyclopædia Britannica* [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2016].

audience to understand—did not adopt Swift wholly. He did not share Swift's bitterness against humans, most explicit in the ending of *The Gulliver's Travels*. Moreover, Fielding added for instance the introductory essays that function as direct addresses to the reader on topics ranging from morality to literary theory to illuminate rather than to obscure.

Shaftesbury was not only a philosophical influence. With the publication of his *Characteristicks*, a role model of prose writing has been established. In his polemical, essayistic expositions upon subjects political, philosophical, moral, and religious, the unordered, free-flowing cadences of his thought were reminiscent of Michel Mointagne. Subsequent rulers of the form would be Hazlitt and Lamb (especially of the personal essay). By writing in this tradition, Fielding's introductory essays would not always be clear, the discursive tone of the piece would not always yield a unified conclusion, but he would always manage to touch upon an impressive score of various subjects. The probe is economically effective, cuts straight into the matter, and intertextualises the other essays, or 'attempts', that are, in *Tom Jones*, introducing the individual books and chapters. Taken together, the seemingly disparate threads that flow through the individual essays make a coherent rumination. And so, Fielding, in a conversational manner discusses matters moral, religious, psychological, legal, clerical, etc., as a way of introducing and framing the story development to follow.

He who laughs most, learns best.

—John Cleese

## II.

### Fielding as a Moral Philosopher

*In which the moral theory of the novelist gets dissected, analysed, and served.*

The book caused such a moral outrage at the time of its release that the two earthquakes that subsequently hit London were blamed on Fielding himself for single-handedly angering God with his tale of depravity. This reaction, which seems to the modern reader rather as a historical curiosity, can prove to be useful if taken metaphorically, as in Fielding's *A History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* sending strong ripples through the eighteenth century Georgian society by way of baring its vices so explicitly (and casting off its mask with none of the bitterness of Smollett). The low themes of a promiscuous bastard or aging cougars (Lady Bellaston) attracted a fierce critical backlash exemplified by the reaction of none other than Dr Johnson. From second-hand accounts we have of Johnson reaction to the novel—"I scarcely know a more corrupt work;"<sup>1</sup> and that "the virtues of Fielding's heroes were the vices of a truly good man"<sup>2</sup>—we may infer he was not a fan.

In comparison with his peers, Fielding was a realist or rather had the guts to talk about inappropriate or taboo topics, especially when it comes to sexuality as he dared to intimate that women too can be lusty and domineeringly manipulative. Many considered him wicked and his heroes and heroines wanton. Now, nonetheless, *Tom Jones* strikes many as a dry, incredibly prolix morality tract with the occasional laugh or two. Though Fielding did have a morality programme, there is the omnipresent irony, biting wit and a generous endowment of the "comic muse" to lighten and carry the pace.

If Fielding was not on to something, nobody would bother reading him; the book was unprecedentedly successful some fifty years before the rise of the Byronian star, quickly selling over 10,000 copies. This success might also be interpreted negatively as demonstrating the universal cheap appeal of the 'lowest common denominator'—sex sells—chided by staunch moralists like Johnsons, who accused Fielding of frivolity. Fielding was also a moralist but of a different bent and rebuffed thus to the charge of "affix[ing] the Character of

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah More, letter to a sister, 1780, *Memoirs of the Life of Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, 1834, i, 168.

<sup>2</sup> James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. G.B. Hill and L.F. Powell (1934), ii, 175.

Lewdness to these Times. On the contrary,” he retorts, “I am convinced there never was less of Love intrigue carried on among Persons of Condition, than now. Our Present Women have been taught by their Mothers to fix their Thoughts only on Ambition and Vanity, and to despise the Pleasures of Love as unworthy their Regard.” (648) In this critique of his times, we can see Fielding as quite the romantic and a believer in true love, yet his optimism is always sober and well-argued; his good characters realistically surrounded by instances of ill-will. One would wish to see the jaw drop on the critics’ faces upon reading Fielding strike back against the condescending charge of frivolity, that the “present Beau Monde,” whose “true Character is rather Folly than Vice, and the only Epithet which it deserves is that of *Frivolous*.” (648)

Against the more substantial part of Johnson’s criticism and his subsequent followers, against the charge of “moral evasiveness; the naiveté of the supposedly Shaftesburian moral pieties from which the evasiveness is alleged to spring,”<sup>3</sup> we have Coleridge who confessed that, “To take [Fielding] up after Richardson, is like emerging from a sick room heated by stoves, into an open lawn.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, as opposed to Richardson, who was a favourite of the then moralists, in Fielding there is honest life such as it is. Even “the methods of Richardson and Fielding are poles apart,”<sup>5</sup> writes Grundy; where one banishes his presence from the story completely, the other, with great gusto, assumes the role of the theatre director. Unlike the static rooms of endlessly introspecting heroines of Richardson, Fielding offers us an energetic and witty discussion of virtues such as generosity or benevolence in a way that, nevertheless, might seem philosophically feeble at the first glance, but a thorough read will yield a contrary impression.

In Fielding’s eyes, hypocrisy was the cardinal sin, “the bane of all virtue, morality, and goodness.”<sup>6</sup> “His initial impulse as a novelist,” writes Mutter about the genealogy of *Shamela*, “came from the urge to expose and ridicule what he regarded as the hypocrisy of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded* ... a set of sanctimonious self-seekers.”<sup>7</sup> This initial impulse survived to blossom in *Tom Jones* where hypocrisy and pretence are the most distinguishable trademarks of the selfish cast of characters—the Blifil, Thwackum, Western

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Harrison, *Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher* (London: Sussex University Press, 1975) 17.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel T. Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: John Murray, 1836) 336.

<sup>5</sup> Isobel Grundy, “Restoration and Eighteenth Century,” *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, ed. Pat Rogers (New York: OUP, 2001) 258.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Fielding, *Miscellanies*, 1743.

<sup>7</sup> R.P.C. Mutter, “Tom Jones,” *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (London: Penguin Books, 2012) 886.



bunch. The second group of characters is the virtuous legion led by Squire Allworthy. Through the course of the novel, the former group has its vindictive moments (Western saving Sophia before Lord Fellamar's violent advances) as well as the latter its moments of infamy (Allworthy being duped to cast Tom out). In many passages of *Tom Jones*, the narrator discloses that he believes his readers could be roughly divided into two sections: to put it plainly, the ones with a heart and the ones without it. The *good* characters as well as the 'good readers' are characterized by a quality central to Fielding's moral philosophy, good nature.

This might sound like "Shaftesbury vulgarised"<sup>8</sup> in its seemingly plain conception of moral philosophy as "moral intuitionism"<sup>9</sup> reduced to common sense championed by *l'homme moyen sensuel*. It is more complex than that. Bernard Harrison offers a revelatory reading of an episode occurring early in the novel where Sophia's bird gets freed by Blifil who then gives an apologetic speech. The irony is layered thick amidst the clauses. As we progress through the apology which rather turns out to be an oratorical exercise, we begin to laugh. It is because, simply put, "[t]his is altogether too much of a good thing."<sup>10</sup> Blifil endeavours in a rather exaggerated manner to please both Thwackum and the Square, turning the apology into a sermon "which combines in beautiful balance Shaftesburian pieties about the Law of Nature and the Natural Right to Liberty, manifestly intended as a gesture to Square, and an equally well-turned nod to Thwackum."<sup>11</sup>

Harrison uses the term "reconstitutive irony," since the reader processes various (ironic) levels of meaning. Then it is clear that Blifil is the calculative hypocrite, while Tom's climbing the tree to save Tommy, a spontaneous act, expiates him from hypocrisy or deliberateness. Harrison concludes that "Blifil's thoughtful observation that it was Tom's fall that startled Tommy into the claws of the hawk completes the contrast."<sup>12</sup>

Though, one should not be quick to judge: "a single bad act no more constitutes a Villain in Life, than a single bad Part on the Stage," (270) wrote Fielding and bid the reader not to make a swift, categorical judgement according to a singular act of mischief. It is not really the act itself that is being put under greatest scrutiny by the overt and invasive narrator, but rather the motivations behind those acts grappling with the consequences of one's behaviour and the long-term agenda. The actor might have acted, from various reasons,

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<sup>8</sup> Sir John Hawkins, *The Works of Samuel Johnson* (London: 1787) 215.

<sup>9</sup> Harrison, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Harrison, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Harrison, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Harrison, 64.

against his own good judgement. Fielding wrote on several occasions he was writing a comedy of manners. Comedy of manners is a genre that “has for its main subjects and themes the behaviour and deportment of men and women living under specific social codes.”<sup>13</sup> This, together with shallow readings, generated complaints on the “wooden” quality of Fielding’s characters voiced in Johnson’s metaphorical clock-work rebuke. Harrison writes that “Johnson saw in Fielding’s characters only dial-plates with no clock-work behind them.”<sup>14</sup> The inner workings of the character’s minds were, according to Johnson, much better depicted by the art of Richardson.

Fielding however does offer insight into the character more than it might seem; it is done by way of theatrically honed dialogue of great pith and ironic charge. Characters are revealed through their conduct. In this context, we may posit rhetorically with Henry James, “What is character but the determination of the incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?”<sup>15</sup> This quotation articulates very well how incidents in the course of the plot tell characters, with no need for lengthy introspective monologues. James puts stress on character over plot and together with his subjective probing rather has Richardson for his predecessor than Fielding, nevertheless the quotation does capture how Fielding uses plot incidents to reveal subtleties in characters and so the dial-plates with no clock-work behind them charge against the superficiality of Fielding’s characters falls flat.

Harrison witnessed and analysed that technique in Blifil’s speech, through which we sense his hypocrisy seeping once we start laughing. The reader does not need a full length confession of his inner motives. They are apparent from his day-to-day interaction, which to one audience might seem righteous, to another loathsome, and Fielding endeavours to goad the reader towards the good-natured camp. This is how Fielding deploys his morality of the good heart. And it is most explicit in his advocacy of Tom Jones in wake of his many blunders that are presented as pardonable excesses of a youthful mind wanting in prudence. Here Fielding pleads with the reader to focus less on the clumsy conduct and more on the solid character, on the sometimes more, sometimes less virtuous motives, that are revealed from the dialogue.

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<sup>13</sup> J.A. Cuddon (revised by C.E. Preston), *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 179-180.

<sup>14</sup> Harrison, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Henry James, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Nabu Press, 2010).

Another instance of Fielding's technique of fore-fronting the character through action and ironic dialogue and one of the most hilarious scenes is Tom finding Square in Molly's makeshift wardrobe. Fielding's theatrical background furnishing him with experience in constructing a dramatic scene, in comic timing and brisk dialogue is felt throughout. Tom discovers Square hunched down behind a rug in Molly's room, "where among other female Utensils appeared—(with Shame I write it, and with Sorrow will it be read)—the Philosopher *Square*, in a Posture (for the Place would not near admit his standing upright) as ridiculous as can possibly be conceived." (182) Already here in this preface to the ensuing debate between Square and Jones, ironical commentary guides the reader: "with Shame I write it, and with Sorrow will it be read." Square seals his fate by launching into a debate with amused Jones blabbering confusedly about the "Fitness of Things;" what is "unfit," and of things which are "fitting to be done and which are not fitting to be boasted of." He regurgitates his usual spiel but has been caught quite literally 'with pants down' so he fails even to regurgitate his stock slogans: "It was that, Sir, it was that – and that: For you must know, Mr Jones, in the Consideration of Fitness," and on and on not even giving the intimation that he would offer an honest apology for his past and now blatantly hypocritical rebuke to Jones' own philandering. Jones only smiles and says, "Well reasoned, old Boy" (183).

Fielding himself explicates what occurred here and why we laughed in his preface to *Joseph Andrews*, "for to discover any one to be the exact Reverse of what he affects, is more surprizing, and consequently more ridiculous, than to find him a little deficient in the Quality he desires the Reputation of."<sup>16</sup> On this episode, we can see Fielding's mastery of teaching his readers a moral lesson about hypocrisy while having them in stitches.

As we can read and laugh, the character of both Square who desperately strives to sustain the appearance of dignity and the character of understanding Jones is revealed very effectively by way of dialogue, narrator's commentary and stylized language—"the successive comic ironies are nested like Chinese boxes."<sup>17</sup> At the end of the book, Square partly redeems himself, partly digs himself even deeper into the hypocrite rabbit hole by sending his sincere letter of confession and of opportunistic conversion. This letter functions to finally convince Allworthy of Jones' innocence and of Blifil culpability. For the reader, it rather reveals Square with more colour than ever as it manifests that he's capable to act on his

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<sup>16</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 7.

<sup>17</sup> Harrison, 29.

pangs of consciousness yet remains uncured of hypocrisy demonstrated by his conversion and proves himself a splendid opportunist sorely lacking a spine.

Here at the end of the book, Fielding wished that chiefly good-natured readers would remain with him in the “coach,” (using feasting and travelling metaphors for storytelling is very symptomatic of Fielding), some of which would be converts from the ill-natured camp. The good-natured reader, Lynch writes, “must become a privileged, behind-the-scenes companion of the author, who sees not only the reactions of the spectators, but also the various contradictory roles which individual actors assume.”<sup>18</sup> The reader tracks down such development of the characters, how it affects other protagonists and how it impresses upon the imaginary audience. Such is the artistry of Fielding, the theatrical moral physician.

Fielding snubs the ill-natured reader. He makes it apparent that one who does not understand and sympathize with young lovers—who is lost in recognising true love as a blind person is lost in recognising colour—shall not comprehend most of the book and shall feel offended by the proceedings. This happened frequently as voiced by Johnson and such (not to insinuate Johnson was lacking good-nature); rather, Johnson was a different, stiffer moralist than Fielding was. Johnson was a moral rationalist, whereas Fielding’s system sprawled into much subtler depths of the heart. Fielding was a comic moralist who also happened to be telling a colossal story; or, at different points of his life, a libertine playwright indulging in raunchy songs and then a magistrate who used literature to edify the citizens. Or a political writer who happened to be a personal essayist writing about the theory of laughter and complaining about the critics; or a moral theorist who happened to write a novel.

Each preparatory essay, a brief and self-contained philosophical treatise, a piece of literary criticism or a meta- discussion on the craft of the novel (he calls it a ‘history’) introduces a particular book or a chapter. It is not exuberantly experimental as witnessed in Sterne but it makes for an intriguing motley group of genres and approaches and it all contributes to laying out his moral philosophy of benevolence which is then played out in the plot and performed by a score of actors of a differing moral bent. The essays function to contrast that which succeeds, or gravity followed by levity, but the essays are also suffused with playful wit as well as the actual narrative is imbued with pulpit oratory. Particular scenes are staged to enact a subtle and delicate theatre of feeling morality in which no one view is

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<sup>18</sup> James J. Lynch, “Moral Sense and the Narrator of *Tom Jones*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 25.3, *Restoration and Eighteen Century* (1985): <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/450498>> 7<sup>th</sup> Dec 2014.

explicitly correct and only through a clash of contending voices does sufficient material to inform the reader's judgement arise. This is no plain programmatic text as the critics would have it but a sophisticated work of moral philosophy which teaches through laughter by way of systemic ironical layering and a novel with one of the greatest plots in the language—not easily exhaustible.

### *The High and the Low*

The tone of *Tom Jones* is a highly contested subject. To one group of critics, for a long time, Fielding has been a stern moralist; to his contemporary critics, on the other hand, a writer of low themes. That interpretation wants in depth and overlooks the double irony at work. More accurately, Irwin writes that being “[e]ssentially a serious man, Fielding wrote comedy for the serious reader.”<sup>19</sup> This started to change in the 1950s when the “New Look” arrived in Fielding studies,<sup>20</sup> which conceived of Fielding more liberally, more subtly, and without disparaging his works as low. Inspired by Shaftesbury who propounds the naturalness of mixing the high and low, the sentimental and the imagination, Fielding expressed his views on style and on the intermixing of various, opposing genres in *The Covent-Garden Journal*,

It is from a very common but a very false Opinion, that we constantly mix the Idea of Levity with those of Wit and Humour. The gravest of Men have often possessed these Qualities in a very eminent Degree, and have exerted them on the most solemn Subject with very eminent Success. These are to be found in many Places in the most serious Works of Plato and Aristotle, of Cicero and Seneca ... Not to mention the Instance of St. Paul, whose Writings do in my Opinion contain more true Wit, than is to be found in the Works of the unjustly celebrated Petronius.

In like Manner, and with like Error we unite the Ideas of Gravity with Dulness, as if the former was inseparably annexed to the latter.<sup>21</sup>

In short, “The Highest Life,” he remarks with curious candour, “is much the dullest.”<sup>22</sup> What Fielding achieves in this paradoxical passage is articulating and clarifying his art and claiming a hefty heritage for that art. Witty seriousness has been around for as long as great thinkers

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<sup>19</sup> Irwin, W.R., “Satire and Comedy in the Works of Henry Fielding,” *ELH* 13.3 (1946): 170

<sup>20</sup> William B. Coley, “The Background of Fielding’s Laughter,” *ELH* 26.2 (1959): 229.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Fielding, *The Covent-Garden Journal* 1752 v. 18, ed. Gerard Edward Jensen (London: OUP, 1915): 243.

<sup>22</sup> William B. Coley, 230.

spoke so as not to bore. Where Fielding is more earnest, the influence of the Latitudinarian divines is more apparent; where he is more jocular, one might reference the great classical comics (Aristophanes), satirists (Cervantes, Swift) or witty preachers (Robert South) as influences. As a result, Fielding's writing style is a synthesis of the abovementioned turned his own way; a blend between earnest preaching and playful levity, sustained on an ironic plane that winks at the reader by the use of hyperbole, parody, inappropriate register or epic descriptions of mundane or ridiculous scenes (like when Mrs Waters seduces Tom in one of literature's most *epic* eating scenes), to name a few. Yet, the reader tends to retain both the readings as the synthesis has been done so well that the borders between the low and the high melt<sup>23</sup>.

Shaftesbury was not only a moral inspiration but also a literary one. In *Characteristicks* Shaftesbury stresses the importance of the low, and, especially, the effective use of raillery to disarm false gravity. Shaftesbury depicts "a certain exquisite and refin'd Raillery ... by virtue of which he [the poet] cou'd treat the highest Subjects, and those of the commonest Capacity both together, and render 'em explanatory of each other."<sup>24</sup> By placing noble words into the mouth of somebody like Blifil, or plain dirty talk into the mouth of a noble lady, Fielding puts to work layers of irony with the aim of engaging the reader. The reader performs a moral judgement under the subtle directives Fielding engineered into the talk/action contrast.

Characters' verbal interaction in discourse with other characters clashes harshly with their actual conduct outside of that discourse; or, when fitted in the overall architecture of the narrative, having the audience perspective, the reader employs reason to gather the facts—the proclaimed motivations, the hidden agendas, actual conduct, narrator's spiel—and in this reading or rather cognizing process, vices are revealed. More often than not the rich roster of vices is led by Hypocrisy (Fielding's all-time favourite vice to mock, found among most), insincere affection (Blifil to Sophia), blithe inconsiderateness (Tom), sexual exploitation (committed on Tom), aggressive self-interest and self-assertion<sup>25</sup>, misguided self-delusion (Patridge), etc.

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<sup>23</sup> Coley, 244.

<sup>24</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, "Sensus Communis; an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour," *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vol, ed. Douglas den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001) I, 78.

<sup>25</sup> For this, the main protagonist of Kubrick's 1975 *Barry Lyndon*, played by Ryan O'Neil, is the wonderfully exemplary embodiment of a pliant upstart. This movie is here mentioned for its high fidelity to the atmosphere of 18<sup>th</sup> novels of sensibility. *Tom Jones* is a prime instance of such a novel. The movie employs many of the literary

Shaftesbury concludes the intermixing of high and low passage with describing the result of such writing technique, that “it was so order’d, that notwithstanding the Oddness or Mysteriousness of the principal Character, the *Under-parts* or *second Characters* shew’d human Nature more distinctly, and to the Life. We might here, therefore, as in a *Looking-Glass*, discover our-selves, and see our minutest Features nicely delineated, and suted to our own Apprehension and Cognizance.”<sup>26</sup> Subsequently Shaftesbury discusses something he calls “Mirrour Writing.”<sup>27</sup> This technique originates in the “Mirror Faculty” of soliloquy, “a literary form,” Coley expounds, “consisting of an instructive dialectic between the two aspects of self.”<sup>28</sup> In order to merge both wit and seriousness, Shaftesbury licenses “a certain Knack or Legerdemain,”<sup>29</sup> for poets to use. Coley follows that thus “they may appear to be serious, methodised and proper without in fact so being.”<sup>30</sup>

Discussing duplicity of self, Shaftesbury uses primitive psychology for literary theory, which he neatly encapsulates in the metaphor of a “Pocket-Mirrour.” Poets can use it to see their duplicate faces, to split their literary personas so that in writing then both tones are fused on different levels of the text. According to Shaftesbury, what they see is a face of “commanding Genius,” or self-possessed gravity; the other being the “rude, undisciplin’d and headstrong Creature, whom we our-selves in our natural capacity most exactly resemble.”<sup>31</sup> From this, the genre of dialogue (and soliloquy) naturally springs.

Fielding, with his theatrical practice of publishing for the stage, adopted these techniques more than readily as it smoothed his transition from plays to prose. Through this dialectic of tone, mode and register, and through ironic layering (like Fielding’s address “Sagacious Reader,” where the irony is double, aimed at the audience by way of excessive flattery), Fielding weaves his comic-epics together. Shaftesbury theorizes that Comedy came in the wake of Tragedy’s “overripe forms,” or as a reaction to the “false sublime.” As Coley points out, this describes the Augustan mode very well, “as the Augustan canon abundantly illustrates, the permutations of such a device are many.”<sup>32</sup> Coley concludes by affirming the

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techniques of the novels, well translated onto the screen, like the overt narrator, comedy of manners’ preoccupation with stock characters reduced to symbolising particular human aspects and affectionate conduct incongruous to affectionate speech.

<sup>26</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, I, 78.

<sup>27</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, I, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Coley, 239.

<sup>29</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, I, 64.

<sup>30</sup> Coley, 239.

<sup>31</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, I, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Coley, 241.

influence of Shaftesbury on Fielding was, above all, literary and not philosophical.<sup>33</sup> Though the fact that Shaftesbury had had a commanding literary influence on Fielding certainly needs stating and restating, I would not go as far as to proclaim that it was “*above all*, literary;” though it is true that Fielding shares much more in philosophical thought with Hume for instance than with Shaftesbury or Hutcheson, as will be expounded below.

“My Lord Shaftesbury tells us, that gravity is of the essence of imposture,”<sup>34</sup> Fielding writes in his *An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men* followed by a slight retraction from this statement, yet concluding, “though I have known some of the silliest fellows in the world very eminently possessed of it.”<sup>35</sup> In Fielding’s work, gravity makes scarce appearance as spoken by Fielding (perhaps in *Amelia*, but that is Fielding past his prime). What we rather see is an earnest disputation on some moral topic, succeeded by a comic episode. Where gravity makes ample show is when one of the hypocrite characters assumes the stage, when a nitwit tries to exude seriousness. Fielding uses this very well, as has been demonstrated on Blifil’s rhetorical apology or when Molly is reproaching Tom after he tells her he can’t stay with her to raise her child. Molly sanctimoniously reprobates Tom for abandoning her, and she stresses her devoted constancy... until Square the philosopher is discovered behind the rug.

To move to the other extremity opposite to gravity, the burlesque is discussed by Fielding, who in his preface to *Joseph Andrews* draws a clear line between his output, which is comic, and other writer’s work which is absurd and far from actual life, burlesque. Fielding only admits that he uses the “cadence” of the burlesque when describing certain farcical scenes. “And I apprehend,” Fielding writes in his preface to *Joseph Andrews*,

my Lord Shaftesbury’s Opinion of mere Burlesque agrees with mine, when he asserts, ‘There is no such Thing to be found in the Writings of the Antients.’ But perhaps, I have less Abhorrence than he professes for it: and that not because I have had some little Success on the Stage this way; but rather, as it contributes more to exquisite Mirth and Laughter than any other; and these are probably more wholesome Physic for the Mind, and conduce better to purge away Spleen, Melancholy and ill Affections, than

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<sup>33</sup> Coley, 242.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Fielding, “An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men,” *The Works of Henry Fielding, Esq. With an Essay on his Life and Genius by Arthur Murphy, Esq.*, IX (Red Lion Passage, Fleet Street: Nichols and Son, Printers, 1806) 407.

<sup>35</sup> Fielding, 407.



is generally imagined. Nay, I will appeal to common Observation, whether the same Companies are not found more full of Good-Humour and Benevolence, after they have been sweeten'd for two or three Hours with Entertainments of this kind, than when soured by a Tragedy or a grave Lecture.<sup>36</sup>

Fielding is here pleading for popular entertainment, for fun over seriousness. But as has been argued, in Fielding, fun is always peppered with wit. What he is rather criticising in this excerpt is dullness. Fielding at his best, through intermixing of the high and the low—in his and Shaftesbury's world the distinction is rather between witty and dull—achieves profundity, a comic wisdom of the world and of characters. Coley elaborates on many of the instances where a righteous buffoon affects virtue through gravity and is revealed for what he really is: “[i]n [a] typically Menippean collision between [...] abstract dogma of the sublime and the gnomic wisdom of the ‘low’ there is what Shaftesbury called a ‘triumph in reverse,’ a tableau in which the sublime is overwhelmed by the profound.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 5.

<sup>37</sup> Coley, 246.

### III.

#### Fielding and The Philosophers

*The final chapter in which Hume's moral theory is properly introduced, the two great thinkers, Henry Fielding and David Hume, compared and the claim that certain major currents of the eighteenth century literature and philosophy were homogenous in thinking about moral sense corroborated. Discussion of the other philosophers and a final affirmation of Fielding's & Hume's symphony of thought concludes the chapter.*

#### *The Affable and Corpulent Gentlemanly Loiterer<sup>1</sup>*

The starting point of Hume's moral philosophy may be drawn as a reaction to all the *Speculative philosophies* for Hume maintained that one has to build one's philosophy on direct empirical observation of the human nature in action and not on any hypothetical rationalising. Out of this endeavour, the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* were born, from which a special kind of moral sensing philosophy has been interpreted. Tracking the development of Hume's argument in both the books does not produce an obvious answer to the question how great of a part in Hume's moral philosophy do sentiments, utility, reason, sympathy, utility, laws and conventions play—all of these being some of the main 'players' in Hume's moral theory. And even in this form, the list of the main ingredients is not by far complete. What plays a dominant role in determining a virtuous person, and on extension the sort of a moral theorist Hume was, is the person's level of sociability. Depicting a moral person is after all the whole agenda of the second *Enquiry* and, from the discussed traits, being a positive contribution to society looms on top of the list and therefore virtues like benevolence, sympathy, friendliness and generosity are valued the most.

There however has not always been a society to be sociable in and that raises several issues: how did society come about, why should we keep promises with all the questionable 'naturalness', or why should we obey made-up laws and conventions. According to Hume (and akin to Hobbes' "state of war" notion), humans first found themselves in separate proto-families, some of which then united together to form tribes in order to improve their living conditions and protect themselves against other tribes and all kinds of danger. The argument may be carried as far as to assert that without the societal intercourse and coming together, Hume declares, "Tis' utterly impossible for human nature ever to subsist."<sup>2</sup> Gradually, early humans saw the massive usefulness of cooperating with other groups of individuals and in

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<sup>1</sup> A.E. Taylor, *David Hume and the Miraculous* (Cambridge, 1927) 53.

<sup>2</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: OUP, 2011) 363.

doing so, to a certain degree, they made up for their innate human deficiencies, as Hume listed: “By the conjunction of forces, our power is augmented: By the partition of employments, our ability increases: And by mutual succour we are less expose’d to fortune and accidents.”<sup>3</sup> In the second *Enquiry*, there are further mentioned pleasing advantages that spring from social interaction such as warm affection and friendly enjoyment of each other’s company. Further issues arose: Hume admitted, “they cannot even pass each other on the road without rules,”<sup>4</sup> for the caring disposition towards one another does not extend very far beyond one’s close circle of family and friends and so, among other, the concepts of private property, promise keeping, honesty—Justice—began to show their immense utility.

Hume is not that clear on the initial formative steps of the implementation of the artificial virtues. Artificial virtues meaning *a posteriori* virtues, those picked up in the course of leaving the jungle, the “state of war”; those who only in time emerged as necessary and melded into human interaction so profoundly. He rather describes the circumstances like the hardship of extracting the resources and the immediate danger of lawlessness under which the necessity for such systems manifested itself. But it is clear that the emergence of the fabricated virtues was a necessary step forward; kind of a pair of additional wings that elevated the human species out of their state of savagery. When discussing the virtue of justice as a condition for human survival, Hume put forth the natural and moral obligation to observe the laws of justice, thus rendering it a duty to restrain some of our appetites and give up our unconditional freedom in the name of public interest so that society could flourish and so that humans would subsist. Similarly, Hobbes’ argues that the social contract stipulates that we conjoin forces and give up absolute freedom in exchange for protection.

Penelhum wrote the following about the workings of the concept of duty: “the sense of duty is a conscious substitute for more natural motives and is a product of self-hatred. To feel it is to feel the disapproval of your own lack of a virtuous inclination.”<sup>5</sup> And thus it makes us a more successful species as the individual members actively recognise their drawbacks and act dutifully on remedying them. Hume contended that “[a]ll men have an implicit notion of the foundation of those moral rules concerning natural and civil justice, and are sensible, that they arise merely from human conventions, and from the interest, which we have in

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<sup>3</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: OUP, 2011) 312.

<sup>4</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, OUP, 2010) 32.

<sup>5</sup> Terence Penelhum, “Hume’s moral psychology,” *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David F. Norton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 135.

preservation of peace and order.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover it felt good for there is the corroborative argument of how well it makes us feel to act justly; first then apparent utility, second, the aesthetic confirmation.

Unlike Fielding, Hume traces the genetics of his morality in pure utility and not in divine scriptures or in contemporary sermons as Fielding did with enthusiasm. Whereas Fielding’s approach, being a novelist, is enacting layered interactions with the aim of educating his readers about the morality of the good heart by letting actors play out their actions (in)congruous with their motives, Hume’s method, being a philosopher, is scientific, notoriously empirical and full of premises, deduction, corollary, and proof. Each in his chosen field drove at the moral sensing theory and the essential goodness of mankind and both did so in great literary style.<sup>7</sup>

For Hume, the question whether an act or rather a motive or character of the agent is virtuous or not is decided by the emotional response of the individual observer. Schmitter wrote that Hume holds “moral judgments to be directed at the voluntary actions of others, which are rooted in motivating emotions, especially insofar as they represent enduring dispositions, or character.”<sup>8</sup> If the particular motive or character impresses upon the observer with the consequence of eliciting a certain feeling of approbation, then, according to that person, the particular act is virtuous, whereas if it impresses upon the observer’s sentiments with a certain feeling of uneasiness, it is a vice. Reason, the notorious “slave of passions” here plays the supporting role of amassing facts about the particular case to be assessed and then presents this case file to the supreme judge, the moral sentiment which immediately and instinctively determines either the virtuousness or viciousness of the judged act.

There is no one thing or a single aspect that determines the virtuousness or viciousness of a deemed incident. It is as with the beauty of a sonnet where one can write thousands of pages in criticism about the single separate qualities and minute brilliant nuances and yet the particular origin of its beauty evades scrutiny. There are beautiful aspects but they only form a part. Full beauty (or ugliness) can only be relished as it impresses the sentiments of the reader as a whole. List an exhaustive account of a particular crime and there will not be

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<sup>6</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: OUP, 2011) 364.

<sup>7</sup> Hume was a celebrated prose stylist, which is quite rare with a first class philosopher with some notable exceptions like Plato or the lost works of Aristotle.

<sup>8</sup> Amy M. Schmitter, “17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Theories of Emotions,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2010 edition, Oct 2010 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/emotions-17th18th/>> 19 Sept 2013.

one fact that can be *pointed at* as the source of its viciousness; only as a whole, with all the accrued facts present in the mind does it impress the sentiment and not the reason as blameable.

In a similar vein, Fielding admonishes the critics lest they criticise an individual portion or aspect of his work while failing to mind the overall context, its place in the overall mosaic: “and for a little Reptile of a Critic to presume to find Fault with any of its Parts, without knowing the Manner in which the Whole is connected, and before he comes to the final Catastrophe, is a most presumptuous Absurdity” (446). And so it is with justice. Just acts need to be perceived in all their detail so that a judgement can be made. The extremely useful virtue of justice brings pleasure to the members of a given society to such a degree that, in a sense, it loses some of its artificialness. And therefore the so-called additional wings that lifted us from the animalistic morass become inbred. Hume declares, “Tho’ justice be artificial, the sense of its morality is natural.”<sup>9</sup>

There are many arguments criticising the moral sensing school of thought: mainly, How does one know for certain that this specific motion of the heart is the *official* pronouncement of the moral sense; or, How come most of the time people differ in their moral opinions to such a degree that one, by having lived and having experienced many trials and tribulations, discards any sort of a notion of a shared, universal faculty right away. To the first piece of criticism, the simple answer is that one just *knows*; to put it in modern terms that one has the *gut feeling* or that one *does the right thing*. What used be a matter of the heart, became an issue of the gut. As we can see, in our times the seat of morality has moved somewhat unglamorously lower. It is at the same time very sentimental, visceral and naïve. Further answer, as this is very unsatisfactory, will be given in the course of delineating Hume’s and Smith’s conception more closely.

Analysing Hume’s conception of justice, besides necessity, utility, and pleasurable feelings of approbation, there further are another two agents at play, i.e. self-interest and sympathy that deserve paragraphs on their own. In perusing the role of self-love and sympathy, a further distinction will be made illuminating what the common point of view is and why it is not considered quite that objective as it might seem. If a man does me wrong, I may as well call him my *enemy* or *rival* but this denomination is only valid with me in the picture—it is the language of self-love. To put it in the words of general discourse others may

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<sup>9</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: OUP, 2011) 395.

relate to, one has to describe the person as *vicious* or *depraved*. If one craves others to concur with him that someone did him wrong, “[one] must here, therefore, depart from his private and particular situation, and must chuse a point of view, common to him with others:” Hume instructs and goes on to craft an illuminating metaphor, “He must move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string, to which all mankind have an accord and symphony.”<sup>10</sup>

The virtue of sympathy enables us to tap that string; to feel how it is for others to be wronged and thus in forming a kind of a bridge between ourselves and other human beings, based on our own stock of life experiences, it enables us to see and recognise what is bothering them and to relate. Rachel Cohon argues that Hume “regards moral evaluation as inter-subjective,”<sup>11</sup> and through sympathy we tap the inter-subjective realm of the common point of view, of “common humanity” (672). Thus, as Hume concludes, “*Self-interest* is the original motive to the *establishment* of justice: But a *sympathy* with *public* interest is the source of the moral approbation that attends that virtue,”<sup>12</sup> and that interconnects us in the joint goal of pursuing the most usefully constructed society. Here we can see the philosophical synthesis Hume propounded, a thesis that draws on the selfish school of thought as well as on the moral sensing one; Hume however strongly aligns himself with and develops the latter.

Public opinion, a phenomenon now taken for granted, was just coming of age at the time when Fielding and Hume wrote. Public discourse was rapidly emerging as the bourgeois were becoming more and more literate and learned. People craved to share their opinions. Highly effusive letters were sent to magazines by common folk gushing over the latest romance. But the booming general discourse was also employed for more constructive debates like forming societies and charity organisations (also thanks to the influence of Latitudinarian preachers), spreading information, educating (the lower middle class, and the nascent middle class)—in short, a national discussion was being born. And Fielding wrote *Tom Jones* with the aim in mind to contribute to that lively discourse. He wrote a book that revolves around sympathising with our fellow human beings (Smith’s fellow-feeling), a faculty, Hume argued, that bridged the gap between two existences<sup>13</sup>. Smith would stress the

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<sup>10</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, OUP, 2010) 76.

<sup>11</sup> Cohon, 126.

<sup>12</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: OUP, 2011) 320-321.

<sup>13</sup> “Selves” would be an inappropriate term here since in his psychology of the mind, what Hume drives at is a nearly Buddhist conception of consciousness as an illusion, solely being formed by an in-flow of incessant

role of imagination and of “bringing home” the case of the other to vividly imagine the other’s pain or joy and try to participate on that feeling.

How then is Hume’s (and partly Fielding’s and Smith’s) society still solely inter-subjective and still not quite spilling into objectivity? It is after all a general discourse to which every feeling individual may contribute. But the discussion about Hume’s theory concerns moral judgements that are grounded in one’s moral sentiments; though they are copied ideas and not lively impressions and therefore in the category of matters of fact, the objective faculty of reason only manipulates and informs these value judgements—it does not create them. We are thus conveying the ideas of emotional responses that have been copied from the initial sense impressions; motives, which, as in Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, stand above the deeds themselves.

Rachel Cohon in her book *Hume’s Morality: Feeling and Fabrication* provides a compelling reinterpretation of Hume’s moral philosophy where she strikes a series of serious blows to the common reading of Hume’s meta-ethics. Cohon boldly asserts that our moral judgements, which are traditionally supposed to be mere passions, are conveyable and some of them even true under Hume’s definition of truth. His definition reads as either the discovery of the proportions of ideas “considered as such,” or truth as the conformity of our ideas of objects to their “real existence.”

Cohon wrote that, “[m]oral opinions that agree with the moral impressions we experience under the right conditions [...] are true, just as color opinions that agree with our impressions of color in good light are true.”<sup>14</sup> In Hume’s moral system one senses the virtuousness or viciousness in a similar way as one senses the heat of a fire. It is only similar and not the same because when feeling morality the sensation of approbation or blame doesn’t arise *just like that* as with feeling the heat of the fire but on *reflection* of the pertinent facts. Reason acts here again as the great amasser of facts about the particular deed (a character or his or hers motives) to be assessed and presented to the prime judge, the moral sentiment, which is also why people can determine whether an act is virtuous or blameable afar (even from only hearing about it from a reliable source) in feeling pleasure or uneasiness upon reflecting on the relevant facts. In this sense the value judgements can in certain cases be true

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perceptions and impressions, from which ideas are made and stored in the memory. Hume describes an inner world comprising nothing else; no central “I” that would ground a personality.

<sup>14</sup> Cohon, 106.

as they stand sound through critical sensing reflection upon the relevant facts and on drawing upon one's own emotional history of feeling morality—they are *considered as such*.

However the second condition of truth is not met: in Hume's theory the ethical properties are reaction-dependant and do not have *real existences* independently and of themselves. A convergence of the observer's moral sensing heart (gut) and the act to be assessed is needed. Hence, this special kind of moral sensing theory can be pinpointed as *moral cognitivism* because we can check for veracity of the value judgements as we reflect upon the deeds and motives and as *anti-realism* for the values do not exist independently and are reaction-dependant.

To conclude the surface of Hume's moral philosophy that has been scratched here, he is arguably a virtue ethicist and moral cognitivist anti-realist, as it has been defined. This system is distinctly humane in its common-sense yet thorough empirical observation of the human nature; mixing philosophy and psychology, it is all rather descriptive than normative. However, as Penelhum opines, "Hume is not in any general way, confused between descriptive and normative claims," and goes on to advocate the philosophical significance of self-knowledge: "there is nothing in principle confused about seeing an understanding of our nature as a guide to one's way of life, or even to the proper practice of philosophy"<sup>15</sup>—an eighteenth century's very own self-help book of immense depth.

In the wake of the formation of society following men's departure from the savage state the artificial virtues, especially Justice, arose and forever manifested the usefulness of staying together and conforming to the laws and conventions of the particular polis. Except for the time when the rulers or the social institutions, which function as the referents for the fabricated virtues, themselves become immoral—here, Hume as well as Hobbes would allow us to overthrow the corrupted rulers. What makes Hume's morals so humane simultaneously makes it hard to sort or associate with either of the prevailing schools of moral thought at that time, crudely distinguished as the Sceptics (Hobbes, Mandeville) and the Optimists (Grotius, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury). The former being united behind the selfish theory with the core claim that "humans are essentially amoral,"<sup>16</sup> and the latter adopting a philosophy asserting the intrinsic capacity of human nature to feel morality and the tendency to act virtuously.

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<sup>15</sup> Penelhum, 143-144.

<sup>16</sup> David F. Norton, "Hume, human nature, and the foundations of morality," *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David F. Norton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 151.



Hume in a way had started out by adopting some portions of the selfish theory with its concern for one's own survival and comfort but in the end his moral philosophy revolved strongly around people's capacity to care for each other: to sympathise, to obey laws, to be benevolent and generally a positive contribution to society. It has its utopic/dystopian aspects. For the moral man in Hume's programme, being in accord with one's nature while under the influence of social nurture is all. Sensing the virtuous and the useful on into the future, which in the philosophy of the "affable and corpulent gentlemanly loiterer"<sup>17</sup> is practically the same, we may hope that Hume's special kind of moral hedonism shall keep the feebly winged creature of society afloat.

### *The Fielding Connection Cemented*

The pleasures of society (good company, conversation) and of a "fair mind" (contemplation and study) are emphasised as opposed to luxury similarly in both Fielding and Hume. Sophia defends herself deftly against her aunt, Mrs Western, who implores her to wed Lord Fellamar with the "[v]iew of aggrandizing [our] family, of ennobling yourself" (789). This line, which is addressed to Sophia, might as well finish with 'myself.' Against this "ambitious" self-interest, Sophia unfolds into an ironic speech that she must have been "born deficient," (789) "lacking the Sense ... to relish the Delights of Sound and Show" (790). She goes on to say, "[f]or surely Mankind would not labour so much, nor sacrifice so much for the obtaining nor would they be so elate and proud with possessing, what appeared to them, as it doth to me, the most insignificant of all Trifles" (790). Hume uses the words "worthless toys and gewgaws."<sup>18</sup> In these statements the programmatic nature of Hume's and Fielding's works manifests itself fully, a programme to edify the readers, remind them what is important in life and coax moral conduct out of them.

In a passage unusually assertive, Book Four, chapter Six, Fielding advocates Tom's awkwardness about Sophia's expressing her affection for him. Tom shuns her because at that time his heart or rather his underbelly is spellbound by Molly Seagrim. He is like Buridan's ass who can't decide whether to drink or to eat. With Sophia, it is deeper and therefore more intimidating for the shy Tom. Molly gets her way, which is also intriguing for its proto-feminist quality with women in charge (also Lady Bellaston, Mrs Miller, Mrs Western,

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<sup>17</sup> A.E. Taylor, *David Hume and the Miraculous* (Cambridge, 1927) 53.

<sup>18</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, OUP, 2010) 82

Honour, etc). Tom is graced with the company of strong, lusty, dominating heroines who manipulate him to serve their ends. To Tom's surprise, Molly is suddenly with child. And here, Fielding launches into a spirited defence of Tom's character which is sullied by youthful imprudence. The passage, as many other such passages where it is the moment for the reader to judge a deed, the reader is implicitly bid to weigh the facts of the case and tap her inner moral sense in order to render a value judgement. The language is very judicial, Fielding is the legal assistant to the reader, the magistrate. Fielding preludes, "I shall set forth the plain Matter of Fact, and leave the whole to the Reader's determination" (128).

Fielding then goes on to make Tom's case in the process of which he gives a preciously detailed account of his moral philosophy:

Mr Jones had Somewhat about him, which, though I think Writers are not thoroughly agreed in its Name<sup>19</sup>, doth certainly inhabit some human Breasts; whose Use is not so properly to distinguish Right from Wrong, as to prompt and incite them to the former, and to restrain and with-hold them from the latter.

Here we can see the stress placed on action—active charity—instead of contemplation. One either feels the force of moral claims, or one does not. In this feeling of compelling duty, Fielding somewhat solves Kant's problem at the end of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. What Fielding would have disliked in Kant is Kant's moral rigorism, which, in its "reverence for an abstract and content-free Moral Law,"<sup>20</sup> also harks back to Shaftesbury, who considered moral truths to be mind-independent. Fielding's morality is much more attached to human interaction and to context and therefore much more case-specific. It is moral intuitionism as opposed to the moral rationalism of Kant. It is Hume.

Fielding resumes with a metaphor elucidating this "Somewhat," the moral sense:

This Somewhat may be indeed resembled to the famous Trunk-maker<sup>21</sup> in the Play-house: For whenever the Person who is possessed of it, doth what

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<sup>19</sup> Hume's moral sense, Butler's conscience, Hutcheson's internal sense.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Harrison, *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher* (London: Sussex University Press, 1975) 46.

<sup>21</sup> *Arch.*, a critic who pounds upon the benches in a show of approval.

is right, no ravished or friendly Spectator is so eager, or so loud in his Applause; on the contrary, when he doth wrong, no Critic is so apt to hiss and explode him.

Then elaborates a more universal metaphor:

To give a higher Idea of the Principle I mean, as well as one more familiar to the present Age; it maybe considered as sitting on its Throne in the Mind, like the LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR of this Kingdom in his Court; where it presides, governs, directs, judges, acquits and condemns according to Merit and Justice; with a Knowledge which nothing escapes, a Penetration which nothing can deceive, and an Integrity which nothing can corrupt.

This active Principle may perhaps be said to constitute the most essential Barrier between us, and our Neighbours the Brutes; for if there be some in the human Shape, who are not under any such Dominion, I chuse rather to consider them as Deserters from us to our Neighbours; among whom they will have the Fate of Deserters, and not be placed in the first Rank (128).

This final portion stresses the infallible quality of the moral sense and also promulgates a sentiment shared by Hume that whoever lacks the basic viscerally human grasp of good and evil loses, in their eyes, her status as a human being. This also functions as a retort to the forensic psychiatrist who would contend with the case of a psychopath against the moral sensing school of thought. According to both Hume and Fielding, whoever is not capable of feeling the basic difference between right and wrong, does not feel the natural inclination towards goodness and is simply without conscience is as good as a beast. This philosophy is very much about exclusion as it is about encouraging charitable deeds.

Fielding as well as Hume were of the view that the certain kind of a compelling motivation emanating from the presiding influence of the supreme justice, the moral sense, is a passion, “for this, as I have said,” Fielding writes, “is an active Principle, and doth not content itself with Knowledge or Belief only” (129). Michael Gill writes that Shaftesbury “argued (in a manner that anticipates Hume) that because our sense of morality is a sentiment, it can be opposed only by another sentiment.”<sup>22</sup> This being a further point on which the

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<sup>22</sup> Gill.

discussed thinkers agree. The infallible moral sense provides judgements that by their own virtue compel to moral action. To paint this in vivid colours, it is the same case as with some strong passion like vengeance, from which purpose one cannot talk the vengeful character out of using clever arguments. Only another strong emotion like sympathy, forgiveness or mercy could persuade the character by replacing the prior passion.

Battestin writes about Fielding and his lifelong struggle with “‘vehement passions’ [...] which seemed irresistible.” “Like Mandeville,” Battestin continues, “and more recently and cogently, like David Hume in the *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, he became convinced that reason and the will, the agents of morality in classical moral philosophy, were powerless to regulate man’s emotional nature.”<sup>23</sup> Here we can see the philosophical synthesis of the moral philosophies of the then thinkers; yes, Fielding and Hume did believe humans were essentially good, however they had no doubt about the primacy of passions over reason when it came to decision making. Hume’s famous line about reason being the slave to the passions chimes with Fielding’s view since he “so well understood the anarchy of the passions”<sup>24</sup> and built his prudential moral philosophy around this autobiographical wisdom.

#### *Smith and Others*

Adam Smith’s substantial contribution to moral philosophy has been long overlooked<sup>25</sup> and his works have been studied by economists alone. For a long time, David Hume was *the* moral philosopher of the Scottish Enlightening and of the Age of Reason, and Smith the presiding economics prophet. Nonetheless, Smith did write *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in which he elucidated a moral sensing philosophy drawing on both Hutcheson and Hume with an enlarged notion of sympathy at the centre of it. The general moral theory Hutcheson, Hume and Smith put forth is based on a particular intersubjective moral realm, where “fair-minded” individuals may enter and check their moral judgments against other feeling individuals. Paul Russell writes that “according to this account, our shared emotional makeup, and our capacity to take up a disinterested or impartial perspective on actions and characters, makes it possible for us to reason in this sphere and arrive at true

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<sup>23</sup> Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 517.

<sup>24</sup> Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 6.

<sup>25</sup> V.M. Hope, *Virtue by Consensus: The Moral Philosophy of Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 3.

moral judgements.”<sup>26</sup> Instead of emulating Hutcheson and Hume per se, Smith developed his own strain of moral sense philosophy; what made it different was that Smith “reinstated conscience as the source of virtue,”<sup>27</sup> as opposed to benevolence (Hutcheson) or self-interested and intrinsically pleasing regard for social rules (Hume).

As we have seen, Shaftesbury coined the term moral sense and conceived of moral judgements as mind-independent and part of a universal “Harmony”; Hutcheson, basically a theologian, drawing heavily on very similar sources as Fielding, developed that term; Hume refined it and foregrounded social utility; and Smith enlarged the notion of sympathy and restressed intrinsic feel for morality. When we reintroduce Fielding into the conversation, all of the abovementioned principles—conscience, benevolence, self-interested regard for social rules, sympathy, ethics merging with aesthetics—correspond to his moral theory of the good heart. Still, Fielding was essentially a novelist, but, as the thesis has endeavoured to demonstrate, he thought about moral matters with the intelligence and diligence of an eminent philosopher and with the concern for pragmatic application of an effective social reformer.

In terms of direct influence, we can only speak of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume since Smith wrote in the late seventeen fifties, some ten, twenty years after both Hume and Fielding published their greatest work. The case of Fielding and Hume is not so much that Fielding would uncritically assume what Hume wrote; in terms of Fielding’s references, there are not many mentions of Hume’s name. Fielding cites Shaftesbury with exponentially greater frequency for instance, but Shaftesbury’s philosophy has too much of what is being parodied on the character of Square, the philosopher, mainly Shaftesbury’s “Harmony” or “Universal Balance” correspondent to Square’s “Eternal Fitness of Things.” If we are to select the prime philosophical equivalent to Fielding’s literary programme of morality, an ethical aesthete who has, in turn, great literary sensibility, it has to be Hume as has been argued above at length. This thesis propounds that Fielding’s and Hume’s moral philosophies, such as they were, were the most accomplished as expressed in their respective fields and most akin. They inscribed a bridge between literature and philosophy by writing novels infused with high-grade moral philosophy and composing philosophical tracts suffused with literary sensibility, of high readability and of engaging narration in exposition.

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Russell, Rev. of *Virtue by Consensus: The Moral Philosophy of Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith*. By V.M. Hope, *Ethics* 101.4 (1991): 874.

<sup>27</sup> V.M. Hope, *Virtue by Consensus: The Moral Philosophy of Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 83.

Incidentally, the five primary books discussed here followed each other nearly precisely ten or twenty years apart: Shaftesbury's *Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*<sup>28</sup> (1699), Hutcheson's *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense* (1728), Hume's *A Treatise* (1738), Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), and Smith's *Sentiments* (1759). To Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Fielding owes the moral sensing philosophy grounded in divinity and the initial form of the "internal sense" theory; to Hume the development of that idea with a pragmatic, secular bent. Hume's philosophy also corresponds with utilitarianism, which leads us to Priestley, Paley and Bentham. Butler's conscience roughly corresponds to the idea of the moral sense (Hope). Smith is here mentioned to see the culmination of this moral sensing school of thought.

When discussing divinity and just how "anti-religious"<sup>29</sup> Fielding was is a matter of much debate: a good start might be by defining the "religious," because Fielding did ground his philosophy on sermons, nevertheless the preachers themselves were sometimes frowned upon by the High Church for their foregrounding of acts of charity to the observance of dogma. What is meant by "anti-religious" or anti-abstraction is not a comprehensive opposition to religion or philosophy as a field, but an opposition to and a parody of the negative manifestations they can take in selfish and unintelligent individuals, under reductive and biased interpretations of dogmas. Fielding promotes his moral theory of the good heart, which can do well "without any abstract contemplation on the beauty of virtue, and without the allurements and terrors of religion."<sup>30</sup> And this is what makes him quite unique.

Fielding's philosophy is a very much humane, commonsensical philosophy that in essence says that if you are a human being capable of feeling the pain of others, you know how to act morally by intuition and intrinsically. "His vision," Harrison writes, "is less cerebral and more subtle."<sup>31</sup> This supposition hinges on the capability of relating and the moral sensing school of thought, as a dogma of its own, adopted the view that people are essentially good and capable of truly relating. This view contends that truth is in the heart. Anti-rationalist as this is, reason is not completely dispensed with and still serves as the gatherer of facts. Fielding thus undermines the Augustan mode by having the heart prevail over the head.

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<sup>28</sup> Then published as a part of the *Characteristics* voluminous edition in 1711.

<sup>29</sup> André Gide, *Travels in English Literature*, trans. Dorothy Bussey, *Verve* 1.2 (1938): 15.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Fielding, "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," *The Works of Henry Fielding, Esq. With an Essay on his Life and Genius by Arthur Murphy, Esq.*, IX (Red Lion Passage, Fleet Street: Nichols and Son, Printers, 1806) 408.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Harrison, *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher* (London: Sussex University Press, 1975) 120.

Against the charge of naivety, there's the eloquent passage from Kingsley Amis' *I Like It Here*, in which the young writer Bowen contemplates Fielding's works as he's facing the author's white stone sarcophagus in Lisbon and rearticulates the point of this thesis:

“And how enviable to live in the world of his novels, where duty was plain, evil arose out of malevolence and starving wayfarer could be invited indoors without hesitation and without fear. Did that make it a simplified world? Perhaps, but that hardly mattered beside the existence of a moral seriousness that could be made apparent without the aid of evangelical puffing and blowing.”<sup>32</sup>

*Arguments of the Selfish School of Thought Met by Way of a Chance Meeting Between an Old Pessimist and a Young Idealist*

The pivotal meeting between Tom and the Man of the Hill functions as a debate in moral philosophy, a dialogue in style not unlike Plato's. Tom is the optimistic and understanding voice of the good heart and upon hearing the “Stranger's” story where he expresses much contempt for mankind, Tom retorts in a voice, it is probable to assume, is very much Fielding's own:

I believe, as well as hope, that the Abhorrence which you express for Mankind ... is much too general. Indeed you here fall into an Error, which, in my little Experience, I have observed to be a very common one, by taking the Character of Mankind from the worst and basest among them; whereas indeed ... nothing should be esteemed as characteristical of a Species. This Error, I believe, is generally committed by those who, from Want of proper Caution in the Choice of their Friends and Acquaintance, have suffered Injuries from bad and worthless Men; two or three Instances of which are very unjustly charged on all Human Nature (406-407).

The Man of the Hill argues how his lover and his best friend wronged him, to which Tom returns with a more insistent formulation of the thought expressed above, “What better, my good Sir, could be expected in Love derived from the Stews, or in Friendship first produced and nourished at the Gaming-Table!” (407).

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<sup>32</sup> Kingsley Amis, *I Like it Here* (New York: Harcourt, 1958) 185.

The Stranger stresses Tom's young age and thus implies Tom's incompetence and lack of experience in moral matters. Tom replies by a yet more insistent and confident assertion that the Man of the Hill is wrong to generalise the wickedness of a whole species based on a couple of occasions of ill-luck that could have been prevented had he been more cautious in investing his affections and trust. Tom concludes, "In Truth, none seems to have any Title to assert human Nature to be necessarily and universally evil, but those whose own Minds afford them one Instance of this natural depravity; which is not, I am convinced, your Case" (407). The Stranger shifts his tone implying fatherly understanding, yet he condescends to Tom,

And such ... will be always the most backward to assert any such Thing.  
Knives will no more endeavour to persuade us of the Baseness of  
Mankind, than a Highwayman will inform you that there are Thieves on  
the Road. This would indeed be a Method to put you on your Guard, and to  
defeat their own Purposes. For which Reason tho' Knives, as I remember,  
are very apt to abuse particular Persons; yet they never cast any Reflection  
on Human Nature in general (407).

In other words, you will never hear knives' arguing they are knives; no, you will experience their knavery.

Tom's main point is that those imagining humanity to be essentially evil derive so from their own frame or from several encounters with ill will and then generalising from that that all of humanity is wicked. The issue is unresolved as Tom does not reply to this argument. Fielding writes that it is decency on Tom's part that hampers him from pursuing the matter further, but one has the impression that Fielding ran out of arguments. Fielding does not ignore evil. In *Tom Jones* his aim was not to depict the world as it is, but to capture Georgian England in its spirit and to instruct with edifying hilarity. As Battestin writes about the kind of narrator Fielding was and about his aims as an intrusive narrator, "[r]eminding us that the text we are reading cannot be a photograph of what really exists, but is instead a thing made and fabricated by the author, who, by means of the pleasure we take in the illusions of art, may more effectively express his own insights into reality."<sup>33</sup>

Still there is plenty of real-life wickedness in the book. Fielding achieves to create some wonderfully complex and lifelike characters like Squire Western, where both boorish

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<sup>33</sup> Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 328.



selfishness and tender affection intermix. Therefore, Fielding is not saying that there are no evil people in the world; Fielding argues that once you properly get to know the person's circumstances and occasions of ill fortune that have struck them, it is more likely that you will discover how an essentially good individual turned a thief. In regards to people utterly lacking moral sense, compunction and conscience, such specimen according to Fielding and Hume do no longer merit the status of a human being. The key for acting morally, for those who are so furnished and those who have not been tarnished and broken by distressing life experience, is sympathy, the faculty that enables an agent to empathise with another, the faculty that enables an agent to humanise the object of her hate.

## A Neuro Addendum

*Or how the discussed moral theories are nowadays finding hard scientific evidence.*

What the thinkers of the moral sensing school of thought were propounding has been, thanks to the recent discoveries in neuroscience, gaining scientific grounds. The posited capability to feel the pain of others—Sympathy/Empathy—could be traced to the so-called mirror neurons. These were observed during an experiment (Giacomo Rizzolatti and Vittorio Gallese) with one set of monkeys observing another set of monkeys perform certain action. The observers' brains—i.e., their frontal lobes—indicated activity in a certain region of the brain, which, after much analysis, made it apparent that the observers' were able to feel a certain version of what the performers were doing. There was a proven imaginative bridge. V.S. Ramachandran has been one of mirror neurons' most respected scientific champions and said, in light of a backlash against the importance of mirror neurons, "I think they're being played down, actually."<sup>1</sup> Rama, as he is called to his social circle, then goes on and names in scientific detail that which the discussed thinkers were only able to hypothesise: "It turns out these anterior cingulate neurons that respond to my thumb being poked will also fire when I watch you being poked—but only a subset of them. There are non-mirror neuron pain neurons and there are mirror neuron pain neurons." Rama then concludes,

So these mirror neurons are probably involved in empathy for pain. If I really and truly empathize with your pain, I need to experience it myself. That's what the mirror neurons are doing, allowing me to empathize with your pain—saying, in effect, that person is experiencing the same agony and excruciating pain as you would if somebody were to poke you with a needle directly. That's the basis of all empathy.

The research is still in its infancy, yet the hitherto progress has been very promising in breaking down sympathy and thus understanding the intricacies of human morality firmly based in science.

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<sup>1</sup> "Do Mirror Neurons Give us Empathy?" An Interview with V.S. Ramachandran by Jason Marsh, *The Greater Good Science Center*, University of California 2016:  
<[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/do\\_mirror\\_neurons\\_give\\_empathy](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/do_mirror_neurons_give_empathy)> 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2016.

## Conclusion

### *After which the grand curtain is drawn at last*

What has been demonstrated, it is hoped, is Fielding's close affinity in thought and moral programme to the preceding, contemporary and future moral sense philosophers (Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, Hume, Smith). It is hoped that Fielding's position as a moral philosopher of some rank has been established and that the special connection with Hume forged. It is hoped, finally, that the homogeneity and cohesiveness in moral disputations and conclusions within the moral sense school of thought have been shown to cover both literature and philosophy, spilling into the then budding societal discourse at large and thus contributing to forming the modern conception of a good person. How Fielding went about implementing his moral philosophy of the good heart has also been discussed in depth, i.e. the narrator addressing the audience directly or the authorial intrusion, mock-epic style, through the use of layers of irony, by letting the characters compromise themselves, by having good intentions succeed in the course of the plot, by guiding the reader, both overtly and covertly, to make moral judgements etc.

Fielding paints the landscape of the eighteenth century English society in vast and vivid brushstrokes. He covers swathes of societal strata and it is one of Fielding's main points that both virtue and vice can be found on all the levels of society; in the tavern as well as coming from the pulpit. Though the countryside is depicted as being more expedient to the cultivation of virtue, fields and local parishes are not wanting in fops and hypocrites. Characters' function is to represent distinctive amalgamations of virtues and vices—manners—and these are subservient to the plot. As has been argued in the first chapter, this Aristotelian primacy of plot over character is not one-dimensional (the clock-work argument). Fielding achieves to weave in many layers and distinctness into his characters and reminds his readers on many occasions not to make a hasty judgement upon a character, "since," as well as in a play as in life, "it is often the same Person who represents the Villain and the Heroe." (269)

What Fielding's presupposition about his readers boils down to is their understanding of the matters of the heart and of having a moral sensing faculty with which they judge properly upon the numerous contentious events and actions in *Tom Jones*. Upon finishing the book, the reader thus graduates in the major of ethical aesthetics and good nature. A final argument against Fielding's project could run as follows: the author is a propagandist of a particular ideology that he deems right to impose on all of mankind. Should he get the license if his intentions are demonstrably good? Unfortunately, history has stepped over that, and rather proved otherwise, with acts of pure selfishness and malicious intent having been the dominant players in the centuries that followed, whereas kind acts have forever remained a minority. But it is there. And that was Fielding's and Hume's point; that human beings have the definite and proven potential to cast the net of sympathy beyond their immediate circle of family and friends.

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The author visiting Fielding's tomb in Lisbon, located in the British cemetery adjacent to St. George's Church in Rua São Jorge - 22/08/2016



### Visiting Hume's tomb – 22/02/2015, Edinburgh

As soon as I descended,  
Had a pint that got me mended—  
A Scotch bar-keep sent me up the steep Calton  
Hill.

There I found it,  
And as soon as I mounted the stairs,  
Got blazed away,  
Thrown into a literary delirium,  
By a sudden burst of the bright sun,  
Piercing the constant grey.

Hume's looming tomb,  
Towering roundly, self-assured.

There, in the presence of a vast soul,  
Whom I knew;  
He welcomed me with a warm, sage smile,  
I sat at his foot,

I sat at the foot of St. David.